

THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION AND VFX

March
2022

ANIMATION MAGAZINE

TM

**The Proud Family:
Louder and Prouder
Delights on Disney+**

**How Arcane Became the
Stealth Hit of the Year**

**+
Your Guide to the
2022 Annies**

**A Sneak Peek at
Cartoon Movie**



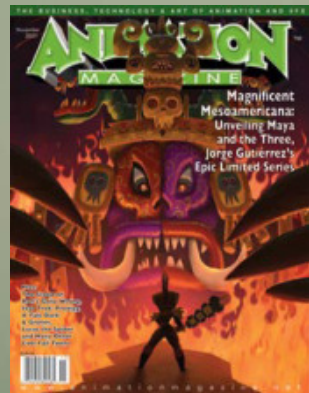
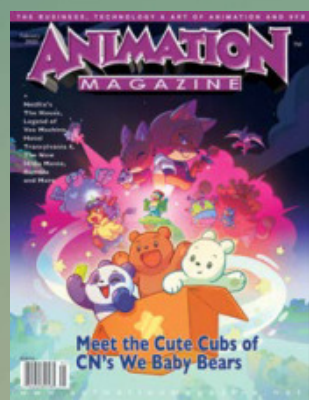
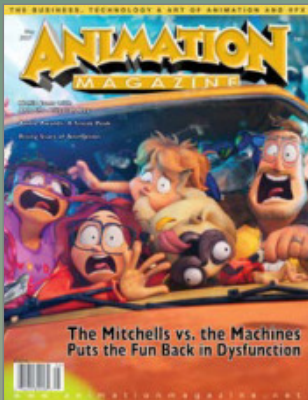
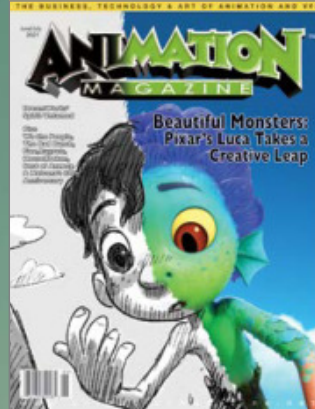
**Loving the Retro,
Rubber-hose Vibes of
The Cuphead Show! on Netflix**

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**The Proud Family:
Louder and Prouder
Is Ready to Roar on Disney+**

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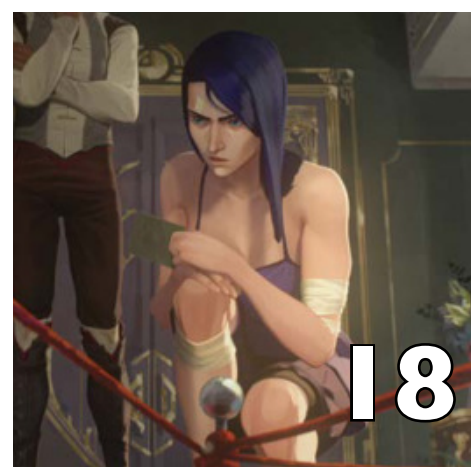
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Cover B: *The Proud Family* makes a comeback on Disney+.

EFM Cover: Wizart presents *The Warrior Princess* and *The Ice Queen & The Princess*.

FROM THE EDITOR



I remember a time when the first couple of months of the year were cultural wastelands where no good movies would open in theaters, since all the solid award contenders had already debuted in November and December. Well, this year, we still don't have a lot of big titles opening in theaters in February – due to the ongoing pandemic. But, fortunately, there are plenty of top-quality specials, movies and series premiering on the streamers, so we had no shortage of subject matter for this month's issue.

We are very excited to check out Bruce W. Smith's hot new reboot *The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder* on Disney+ this month. Our wonderful contributor Jennifer Wolfe has left no stone unturned and no question unanswered in her entertaining look at the making of this ground-breaking cartoon. Bruce was one of talented artists honored at our World Animation and VFX Summit in November, and he brought the house down with his accounts of his wild life before he became a big-time showrunner.

Also on tap this month is Netflix's buzzy new offering *The Cuphead Show!*, which is a delightfully retro, Fleischerific series that is bound to make any fan of those classic, rubber-hosey toons weep with joy. Michael Mallory has done a great job of capturing the creative journey of the show's artistic team in his comprehensive feature article.

The beautifully animated new show *Arcane* was one of the big underdog shows of the past year. After arriving on Netflix in November without a lot of fanfare, it skyrocketed to the top of everyone's must-watch list and has received nine Annie nominations among other accolades. Our longtime contributor Tom McLean talked to some of the talented folks at Fortiche and Riot Games to find out the secret to this runaway success.

What would the first quarter of the year be without another jam-packed edition of Cartoon Movie in France, where we get a sneak peek at what is coming down the pipe from some of the most innovative and forward-thinking studios in Europe. Make sure you catch our early preview in this issue and follow us daily online as we highlight some of these up-and-coming movies once the confab is in full swing.

We were also lucky to have ASIFA's Sue Shakespeare, Frank Gladstone and Jerry Beck give us a special preview of what to expect at this year's Annie Awards. Just as we were going to press, we got word that the event will be virtual again, due to the rapid spread of Omicron. Of course, nothing replaces the live, in-person experience, but the good news is that the Annies livestream was wonderfully entertaining and great fun to watch last year, so we can look forward to another great edition in March. We love the Annies, whether we are enjoying them at Royce Hall or in the comfort of our living room. The show must go on!

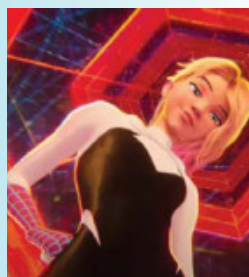
Ramin

Ramin Zahed
Editor in Chief
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QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"*Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse* is a very ambitious sequel, because we didn't want to just sort of do the same thing again. And so the idea that we'd be going to different dimensions really opened up an opportunity artistically to have each world have its own art style."

— Exec producer/writer Chris Miller describing Sony Pictures Animation's *Spider-Verse* sequel which will be released Oct. 7!



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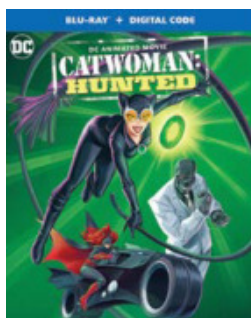
The Must-Have List

Utterly Enchanting! Critics, audiences — basically, everyone and their *abuela* have been singing the praises of Disney's latest visually stunning musical fantasy, *Encanto*. Fresh off its Golden Globe win, the tale of a Colombian family who must rely on one (gasp!) *normal* daughter (voiced by Stephanie Beatriz) to restore their magical gifts is hitting discs. Even if you've already seen Jared Bush & Byron Howard's hit, you won't want to miss out on bonus features covering the Madrigal family, their enchanted Casita, the music (from composer Germaine Franco and songwriter Lin-Manuel Miranda) and more. (Disney, \$20 DVD/\$25 BD/\$30 4K, Feb. 8)



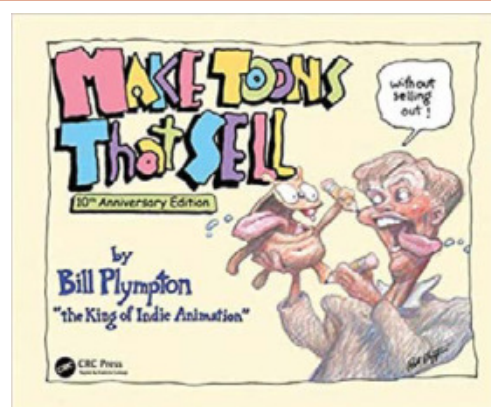
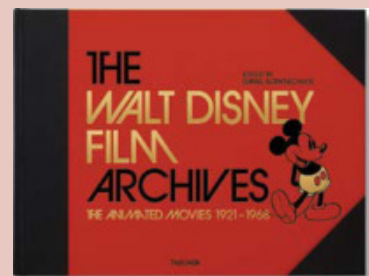
Deliciously Dark Fantasy: If your toon preferences are more *Heavy Metal* than *Cinderella*, Philip Gelatt & Morgan Galen King's *The Spine of Night* is the horror fantasy of your twisted, twisted dreams. The hand-drawn rotoscope tale draws inspiration from Frank Frazetta and Ralph Bakshi to follow a group of heroes from different times on a quest to stop a sinister magic. The stellar voice cast includes Richard E. Grant, Lucy Lawless and Patton Oswalt. (Image, \$28 DVD/\$29 BD/\$36 SB, Feb. 1)

The Purr-fect Crime: Selina Kyle tries on a fierce anime look in the new DC animated movie *Catwoman: Hunted*, directed by Shinsuke

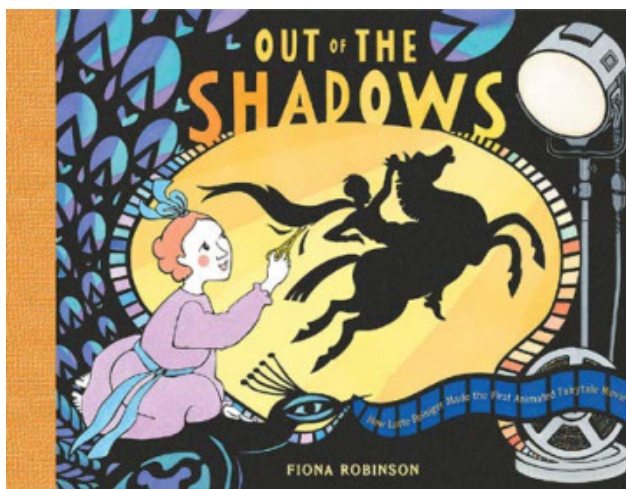


Terasawa. Catwoman (Elizabeth Gillies) can't resist stealing the world's biggest emerald — unfortunately, she snatches it from the hands of the Leviathan criminal empire, who put a price on her head. This cat and crook chase is joined on disc by a villain spotlight doc and a focus on *The Feline Femme Fatale* herself. (Warner, \$30 BD/\$40 4K, Feb. 8)

Pages of the Past: Flip through 620 pages of studio history in the latest edition of Daniel Kothenschulte's *The Walt Disney Film Archives: The Animated Movies 1921-1968*, reissued by Taschen as a landscape hardcover packed with 1,500 photos, sketches and cel setups from the Golden Age of Animation, and more affordable at \$80. (Feb. 25)



Aspiring auteurs also have a chance to snag a 10th anniversary edition of Bill "The King of Indie Animation" Plympton's invaluable *Make Toons That Sell without Selling Out*, for paperback (\$45) and ebook (\$32) perusal. Delve into the secrets of creating poignant expressions of your vision with the Oscar-nominated animator as your guide, offering time-saving techniques, the secrets of crafting a good narrative and more. (CRC, Jan. 26)



Robinson aims to introduce a wider audience of grade school readers to its pioneering German director. *Out of the Shadows: How Lotte Reiniger Made the First Animated Fairytale Movie* is a tribute to one little girl whose love for lore and cut-paper silhouettes grew into a woman's piece of cinema history. (Abrams, \$19, Feb. 8)

You know we stan the story of an unsung animation heroine around here. While toon aficionados are likely familiar with the oldest-surviving feature, *The Adventures of Prince Achmed* (1926), a new picture book from Fiona

— Mercedes Milligan



ХАНАВКА

THE FOREST SONG

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March Animation Planner

3 The month's festivities commence with the **26th Animac** in Catalonia. [animac.cat]

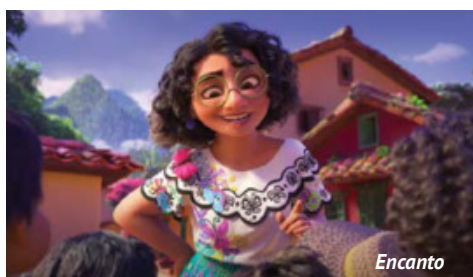
4 New on Prime Video, *The Boys Presents:*



Diabolical is an adult anthology revealing the unseen stories of Garth Ennis's gritty superhumans, each in a unique animated style.

Warner Bros. & DC take another cinematic swing at *The Batman*, this time directed by Matt Reeves and starring Robert Pattinson, Andy Serkis and Zoe Kravitz.

8 Bordeaux's **Cartoon Movie** presents the next wave of European animated features to buyers and producers for three glorious days! [cartoon-media.eu]



And, if all goes according to plan, the Visual Effects Society will celebrate its **20th VES Awards** tonight! *Dune* and *Encanto* are the most-nominated films this year. [visualeffectssociety.com]

9 Austria's **Tricky Women/Tricky Realities** festival returns as a five-day online event, showcasing animation by women and gender minority filmmakers. [trickywomen.at]

10 The biennial **British Animation Awards** toasts the greatest toons in the U.K. tonight. [britishanimationawards.com]

11 Don't freak out! Domee Shi's debut Pixar feature *Turning Red* unleashes panda-monium to Disney+!



It's a great day to kick off a festival: **SXSW** showcases buzzy features, shorts, episodics and XR projects in Austin thru March 20. In beautiful Co. Kerry, Ireland, JAM presents the 2022 edition of **Animation Dingle** — two days of screenings, conferences, workshops and awards. And the **Tokyo Anime Award Festival** runs Mon.-Fri., showcasing shorts and features from all over the globe. [sxsw.com | animationdingle.com | animefestival.jp]

13 The **27th Annual Critics Choice Awards** airs on The CW tonight. [criticschoice.com]

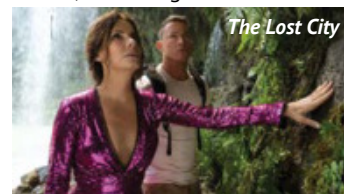
16 **MONSTRA** brings the world of animation to Lisbon for the 21st year with a whopping 12 day program. [monstrafestival.com]

17 To paraphrase Missy Elliott: *Get your Greek on* at the **17th Athens Animfest**, four days of fab films in a legendary city. [athensanimfest.eu]

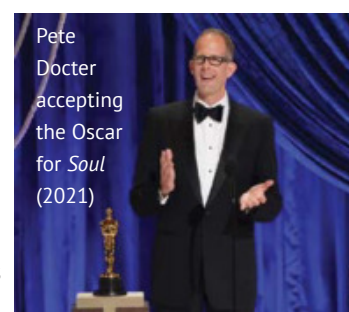
18 *Human Resources* takes us to Hormone Monster HQ to learn more about *Big Mouth*'s helpful (?) creatures, new on Netflix.



25 Sandra Bullock, Channing Tatum and Daniel Radcliffe form an unlikely adventure trio in *The Lost City*, a comedy packed with VFX action.



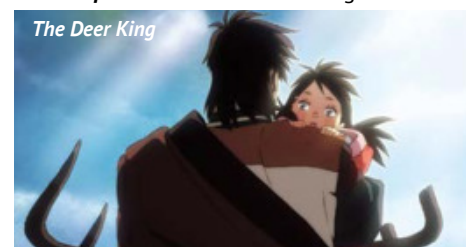
27 The big night is finally here! Find out the animated feature, short and VFX winners of the **94th Oscars**, broadcasting tonight on ABC. [oscars.org]



28 Utrecht, Amsterdam and the internet are about to blow up with another exciting edition of **Kaboom Animation Festival**, presenting 10 toon and XR category competitions thru April 3. [kaboomfestival.nl]

30 Some VFX magic will help Disney+ viewers "embrace the chaos" of new Marvel Studios original series *Moon Knight*, starring Oscar Isaac.

31 We went to press too early to make sure, but there's a chance GKIDS will offer auteur animation lovers *The Deer King*, *Pompo the Cinephile* or *Inu-Oh* on the big screen this



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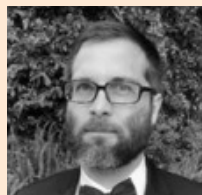
The team behind Netflix's delightful new *Cuphead Show* offer us a special sneak peek of their eagerly anticipated retro toon.

By Michael Mallory

Don't think of Netflix Animation's riotous new comedy series *The Cuphead Show!* simply as the latest TV translation of a highly successful video game (as if that were simple). Don't even think of it as simply a throwback to the classic rubber hose animation of the 1930s (even though it is). At its heart, *The Cuphead Show!* is the story of two brothers who act like brothers everywhere; they fight, they get into trouble, but ultimately they look out for each other. Okay, sure, unlike other famous brother acts, they have coffee cups for heads, but there's a reason for that.

Heroes Cuphead, Mugman and their guardian Elder Kettle are the creations of real-life brothers Chad and Jared Moldenhauer. The characters first appeared in the *Cuphead* video game in 2017 published by their Ontario, Canada-based Studio MDHR. And yes, Chad and Jared did bring some of their familial experience to the project.

"In the game there's an older brother/younger brother dynamic," says younger sib Jared Moldenhauer. Notes Chad Moldenhauer, "When



"When we were showing the game at trade shows or press events, quite a few people asked which studio we had to buy the rights from."

— *Cuphead* co-creator Chad Moldenhauer

we were growing up, I was always attracted to the main hero character while Jared, for whatever reason, liked the sort of out-of-the-box, weird characters who didn't suit the perfect hero image." Cuphead (readily identifiable by his red nose) is impetuous and eager for excitement, despite the danger that might come with it, while Mugman (blue nose), is "a little bit more dorky," in Jared's words, sometimes acting as his brother's conscience. The characters' chief antagonist, or "boss" in game lingo, was the Devil, whom they were at times pressed into serving.

THROWBACK TO THE '30S

Both the game and the series are designed to replicate, at least visually, the style of the early Fleischer cartoons as well as Disney's *Silly Symphonies*. Says Chad, "We asked ourselves, 'How can we have a cool-looking char-

acter that feels like it was made in the 1930s, but doesn't actually copy or look like a generic version of what already existed?'" After creating a body style they liked, the Moldenhauers then experimented with scores of potential heads. "It was a journey of 'let's throw anything at the wall and get crazy,'" notes Jared. "It could be a spaghetti-plate head or a cactus ... anything that works." It was flagons with faces that finally registered, with the addition of drinking straws sealing the deal. "It ties to the old Disney principle about the silhouetting of a character," Jared says. "Once we found that we liked the Cuphead character and the straw was added, it was such a strong silhouette that the character instantly stood out."

It also achieved the purpose of looking right for the time period, when inanimate objects frequently sprung to life in cartoons. "When



Surreal Surprises: The 10-episode first season of *The Cuphead Show!* follows the misadventures of the loveable Cuphead and his cautious brother Mugman on the Inkwell Isles.



"We wanted to create a cartoon that appealed to everyone. The kids will love all the great action and slapstick, but it's also a personality comedy, so you can laugh at all of the characters' human qualities."

— Exec producer Dave Wasson

we were showing the game at trade shows or press events, quite a few people asked which studio we had to buy the rights from," Chad notes. (While no studio rights were purchased in the making of this show, King Features Syndicate is a production partner.)

Simply developing a run-and-gun game and employing completely hand-drawn animation to produce it is one thing (though once again, hardly simple), but then came the challenge of adapting the characters for the broadcast medium. That was taken on by Emmy-nominated animation veteran Dave Wasson (*Star vs. the Forces of Evil*, *Time Squad*), who serves as an executive producer on *The Cuphead Show!* and is also experienced in neo-vintage tooning through writing and directing episodes of the Disney Channel's multi-award-winning *Mickey Mouse*. The onus

was not so much to maintain the game's retro look, but to expand the stories beyond boss battles on increasingly complex levels.

"For the game, they're able to shoot from their fingertips at different obstacles," Wasson says. "But for the series, it seemed like it would be more fun if they didn't have magical powers. They live in a fanciful universe, but there are rules to it." Residing on "Inkwell Isle" (itself a Fleischer allusion), Cuphead and Mugman still square off against the Devil, though not every time out. "In the beginning there was some talk about using or not using the Devil, because it's sort of controversial," he relates. "But in order to have good heroes you've got to have a good villain, and you're not going to have a better antagonist than the Devil himself."

Harkening back to the early Betty Boop

cartoons in which Koko the Clown channels bandleader Cab Calloway, the Devil does a jazzy "Hi-De-Ho" style musical number. So in a later episode does a new character called King Dice, voiced and scatted by the talented Wayne Brady. Unlike those early cartoons, though, the dance moves were not achieved through rotoscoping. "At one point we were considering rotoscoping someone," Wasson says, "but the artist who boarded the King Dice episode animated the dancing straight-ahead in the storyboard, and did it so convincingly that we didn't have to rotoscope."

HARMONY-OUS AFFAIR

To meet streaming series deadlines, the animation production from Lighthouse Studios in Kilkenny, Ireland utilizes the digital Toon Boom Harmony package, but with a lot of hand-tweaking. "Harmony builds rigs that are basically like puppets of each character, but we supplement that with lots of special poses," Dave says. "They would have been called character layouts back in the day, but now they're called special poses. That makes it feel more traditional."

"It has been deeply rewarding and challenging for our creative team to produce a series that lives up to the visually stunning hit video game that the series is based on," says Claire Finn, Lighthouse Studios' managing director. "We adapted our digital cut-out animation pipeline incorporating a lot of hand-drawn, traditionally animated elements to recreate the 1930s rubber hose style. We added highly detailed frame-by-frame, hand-drawn lighting and 2D effects to the episodes and finished them off with some composited cel shadow to create that *Cuphead* look the show's creators were after. We know audiences will love it."

While the look is Depression era, the animation timing adheres more to the 1940s than the slower, deliberate Depression era tooning. "As much as I love them, I'm not sure those early 1930s cartoons would work well for a modern audience as they tend to be a little slower," Wasson states. "Because it's all character-driven comedy, we've made the delivery and the timing a little snappier."

The task of recreating that look fell to art director Andrea Fernandez (*Unikitty!*), who immersed herself into the art of the era. "Whenever I could, instead of just looking at footage, I would go through the Disney Archives or other types of archives that people were keeping online of original artwork of the era," she says. "When you look at something like *Pinocchio* or *Snow White* on screen it's been

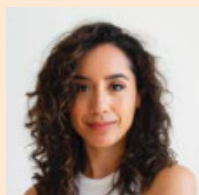
TV/STREAMING



A Spirited Venture:
Created by Chad and Jared Moldenhauer and exec produced by Dave Wasson, the show features the voices of Wayne Brady, Tru Valentino, Frank Todaro, Joe Hanna, Luke Mellington-Drake and Grey Griffin.

through decades of translation through film. But if you actually go back and look at the original artwork, the color choices were actually pretty vibrant.”

The biggest challenge was to recreate the watercolor style of the old shorts in digitized backgrounds (some 100 per episode) while focusing on the colorization – a tricky job since much of the reference material from the old Fleischer Studio was in black and white. “We had to come up with color palettes that worked within that space,” she says. “One of the key things I looked at for the [Devil’s] underworld in particular was the Popeye *Sinbad*, which was one of the only color cartoons the Fleischers did.” *The Cuphead Show!* employed another technique pioneered by the old studio: the use of live-action backgrounds under the animation. “I think we are the first show in a long time to revive the stereoscopic process,” Fernandez states. “Our opening shot of the cottage of Cuphead is a stereoscopic shot which was completely built in miniature form on a soundstage and has 2D animation tracked on top. It was one of the most exciting parts about the show.” Los Angeles-based Screen Novelties handled the stereoscopic process and also contributed some stop-motion animation to the show.



“Whenever I could, instead of just looking at footage, I would go through the Disney Archives or other similar types of archives that people were keeping online of original artwork of the era.”

— Art director **Andrea Fernandez**

GHOULISH DELIGHTS

The art director believes the closest replication of the old style appears in a short titled *Ghosts Ain’t Real*, an homage to early *Silly Symphonies* like *The Skeleton Dance*. “We had this fascination with making a really spooky classic, and it feels to me the most on-the-nose for the era, which was hard to pull off with modern tools,” says Fernandez.

Given that the show is available on Netflix, the standard half-hour packaging format of network or cable shows was ignored. Even maintaining consistent episode length was not an issue. “We were originally using the old theatrical shorts as a model for structure,” says Wasson, “but we found it was hard to stay within a seven-minute format. These stories wanted to be a little longer, so it caps off at something like 10 1/2 or 11 minutes, though each episode is a little different in running time.” Some of the initial 48 episodes, which will premiere over three separate drops, are

presented as two- and even three-parters.

Officially, *The Cuphead Show!* is targeted toward the six to 12 audience, though Wasson says the production team is striving for a more universal appeal. Early toonhead reaction to the show came via an accidental online leak of four episode animatics in mid-2020, which drew millions of views in just a few short hours, but resulted in positive response. As Wasson puts it, “Following in the footsteps of the *Mickey Mouse* shorts or *SpongeBob*, we wanted to create a cartoon that appealed to everyone. The kids will love all the great action and slapstick, but it’s also a personality comedy, so you can laugh at all of the characters’ human qualities — their vanity, arrogance and cockiness.”

Not to mention their often violent brotherly love. ♦

***The Cuphead Show!* premieres on Netflix February 18.**



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Louder, Prouder and Even More Authentic!

Creator Bruce W. Smith and producer Ralph Farquhar discuss the importance of cooking up a new version of *The Proud Family* for today's audience.

By Jennifer Wolfe

Penny Proud is growing up. *The Proud Family*'s plucky 14-year-old star, voiced by Kyla Pratt, faces a host of new challenges in the upcoming series revival, *The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder*, including a "woke" neighbor who thinks Penny could use some schooling, bullying social media influencers intent on canceling her and — so cringe! — her own teenage hormones.

A continuation of the acclaimed Disney Channel series that served as a cultural touchstone for Black audiences during its two-season run, *The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder* arrives on Disney+ on February 23. The new series, first announced in 2020, is executive produced by *Proud Family* creator Bruce W. Smith (*The Princess and the Frog*) and television veteran Ralph Farquhar (*Moesha*), with Calvin Brown, Jr. (*Moesha*) serving as co-executive producer and story editor.

For Smith, *The Proud Family* represented everything that was missing in mainstream animation, namely Black representation, during a time when shows like *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy* and *King of the Hill* were dominating primetime television. "Where the Black

people at?" he demands. "That's kind of what it came down to, and the inspiration for creating the show was that point of, 'When will we be included in all the fun?' I grew up loving shows like *The Flintstones* and *The Jetsons*. For me, as an African American growing up in South Central Los Angeles, I knew that the one element missing in all of my favorite animated shows was us."

In Your Face!

"Timing is everything," Farquhar adds, recounting how often they had asked Disney about a revival over the 16 years since the show had last aired in 2005. "Hey, we need to come back, we need to come back. And then, finally, they said, 'Hey, you guys want to do it?' And as it turns out, you could never anticipate the world, the elements to come into place that have happened over the past couple years, but they did. And a show like this is more urgent than perhaps the first time we were on the air. So, we are just very grateful for having excellent timing."

Much of the original voice cast returns for *Louder and Prouder*, including Penny's mom

Trudy (Paula Jai Parker), dad Oscar (Tommy Davidson), Suga Mama (JoMarie Payton) and Penny's friends Dijonay (Karen Malina White), LaCienega (Alisa Reyes) and Zoey (Soleil Moon Frye). Bresha Webb and Aiden Dodson have taken over the roles of Penny's twin siblings CeCe and BeBe, and EJ Johnson is stepping in to voice Penny's now-openly gay friend Michael.

The biggest changes to the show are "gender identity, obviously racial identity and quote-unquote wokeness," according to Farquhar. "All these things we can now address straight up, where 20 years ago, we had to use code to talk about if Michael was gay, to talk about sexuality, we always had to be sort of underhanded about it. Now we can be sort of in your face with it a lot more. And that's going to be reflected in the storytelling."

"We don't have just one gay person in the show representing the entire LGBTQ+ spectrum, you know what I mean?" Smith adds. "Because that's not what we see when we go outside. A lot of shows that I remember watching always kind of had just that one character, and it's just not fair, because that's



'For me, as an African American growing up in South Central Los Angeles, I knew that the one element missing in all of my favorite animated shows was us.'

— Show creator Bruce W. Smith

not how we see life."

Louder and Prouder also features a new assortment of recurring characters voiced by A-list talents, such as the Leibowitz-Jenkins family, which includes Maya (Keke Palmer) and KG (Artist "A Boogie" Dubose), who not only have to deal with the struggles of being the new kids, but also — in a first for Smithville — having two dads, Randall (Billy Porter) and Barry (Zachary Quinto). Chance the Rapper, Gabrielle Union, Tiffany Haddish, Lil Nas X, Lizzo, Leslie Odom, Jr. and Lena Waithe, among many other stars, also make guest appearances.

Farquhar says the primary goal for the

show was increasing the spectrum of Blackness. "One of the things we're really glad about with *Proud Family* is we're unapologetically Black," he explains. "We strive to be as authentic as possible as it relates to being Black in America, and all its shades, if you will. So no one character has to carry the weight of an entire race of people."

Produced by Disney Television Animation, the visuals for *Louder and Prouder* are overseen by art director Eastwood Wong (*Carmen Sandiego*), with the animation provided by WildBrain Studios and Snipple Animation. "Technology's kind of caught up with the way that we visually create the show, so it's much

more sparkly this time around, and the personalities really read through. The animation really fits the style of the show," says Smith. "We think it's a great match of writing with a visual palette that really complements the writing and the humor."

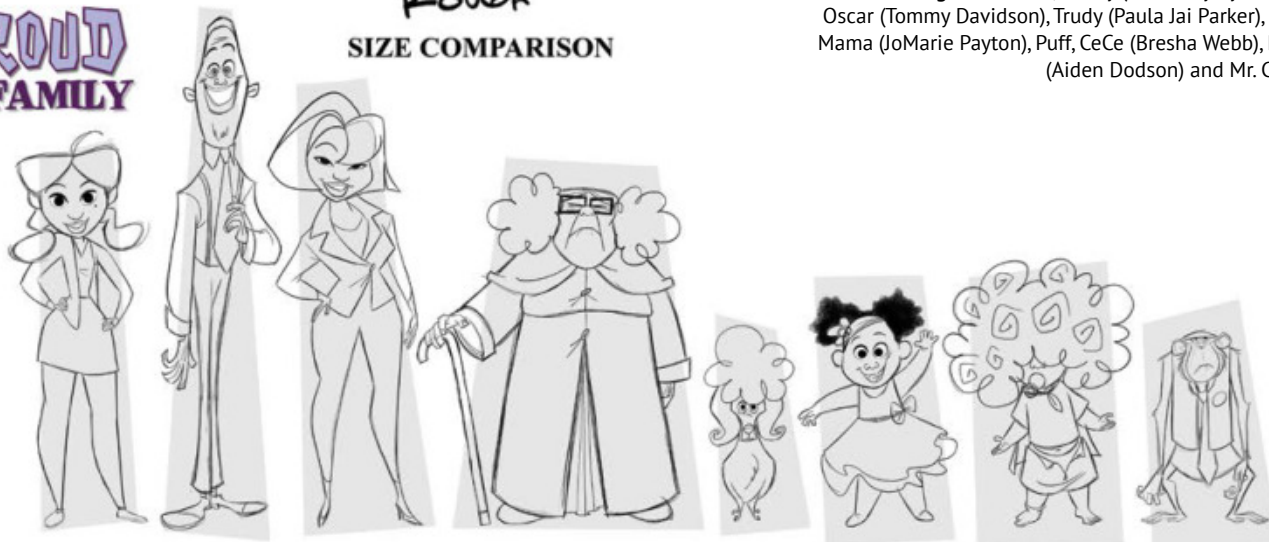
The "fun part," Smith said, was ensuring the production crew mirrored the characters and voice cast. "Working with Disney this time, we really filled out our production staff, not only from an artistic standpoint but also, culturally, where we wanted our show behind-the-scenes. If you look behind the curtain, everyone who's producing the show looks like what you see on screen. So, that idea of diversity and inclusion also exists on the production side of our show. And I think you'll see it on the screen."

For episodic directors, Farquhar and Smith opted to work with fresh, untested talents, including Rudi Bloss, Latoya Raveneau and Tara Nicole Whitaker, who would bring an authentic viewpoint to the series. "I have to give special kudos to our female directors, because, the interesting thing about it is ... neither Bruce nor I have ever been teenage girls," says Farquhar. "And when we were teenagers, girls didn't mess with us! That's, I think, the extra added element this time around, and that point of view is just exhilarating in terms of the moments and the scenes that were brought to bear."

Smith's new character designs are another big change for the new series. Penny and her friends have all been given a makeover, and characters such as Penny's uncle, Bobby Proud (Cedric the Entertainer), have also been updated for the new millennium.

THE
PROUD
FAMILY

ROUGH
SIZE COMPARISON



Proud Lineage: From left, Penny (voiced by Kyla Pratt), Oscar (Tommy Davidson), Trudy (Paula Jai Parker), Suga Mama (JoMarie Payton), Puff, CeCe (Bresha Webb), BeBe (Aiden Dodson) and Mr. Chips.

TV/STREAMING

Modernish Makeovers: Uncle Bobby (Cedric the Entertainer) swaps his dated disco look for equally dated Hammer pants in the new series' character redesign.



Acclaimed composer, songwriter and producer Kurt Farquhar, who wrote and composed the iconic theme song for *The Proud Family*, also returns as series songwriter and composer for *Louder and Prouder*. The new theme song, which preserves the lyrics and melody of the original, is performed by rising R&B star Joyce Wrice.

"You can't mention our show without mentioning music," says Smith. "Solange and Destiny's Child did a fantastic job of really laying out the original theme song, so we wanted to hand over that mantle to someone else to realize the full potential of what they laid out for today."

The process for selecting songs begins in the writer's room, as Farquhar relates. "It starts between the young writers and the old writers," he says, describing how they would go back and forth from current needle drops like Lizzo to redoing songs by older artists like Shuggie Otis and The Brothers Johnson.

That's My Jam!

Looking back on *The Proud Family's* legacy, Farquhar says, "I don't think we were quite aware how important this show was to young Black kids at the time, people of color in general. In the ensuing years, it's just come to us over and over where people say, 'Oh my gosh, I really love this episode, it had Muslims in it,' or 'Oh, I loved the first time I saw myself in a cartoon.' It became clear to us that the show for whatever reason was very, very, very important to people. And so we know we have a huge responsibility to our audience. There are high expectations."

Beyond crafting a hit show, the EPs have equally high expectations for themselves. "Hopefully this show will resonate, not only with the audience that has now grown and has children that are 12 and 14, but also with the young kids today. And that they will see themselves, that they will hear themselves reflected in what we're doing," says Farquhar.

"So our hope is that this show turns out to be as important to a new generation as it was back in 2001 when we first premiered. Normally, you wish you have ratings and you make money. But our hope is to really provide a template for a new generation, what it means to be Black in America, and one that they can watch over and over again, enjoy and laugh about. Hopefully, 20 years from now, someone will say, 'Hey, I remember *Proud Family* back in 2001. That was my jam.'" ♦

***The Proud Family: Louder and Prouder* premieres on Disney+ on February 25.**



"We strive to be as authentic as possible as it relates to being Black in America, and all its shades, if you will. So no one character has to carry the weight of an entire race of people."

— Exec producer Ralph Farquhar

"When Ralph and I sat down and talked about what we wanted to do moving forward, one of the things we thought was important was to sort of age the characters up," Smith recounts. "They still look the same in essence, but we aged the characters up, and visually take the show with it."

Taking Penny Proud and her friends on a sometimes emotional journey of discovery in *Louder and Prouder*, the EPs knew the visuals "had to ride with that," as Smith puts it. "There's a level of dimension that we've added to the visuals to make sure they can help carry the weight of these stories," he says.

"We knew that there was a certain level of gravity that we were going to add to the show. We get very emotional at times," Smith continues, noting that Penny and her friends experience several new firsts, many of them fraught. "So there's a certain cinematic touch we give to these emotional scenes that we probably did not do the first time around. But we made sure that we really leaned into those opportunities to make sure that they're as believable and as touching as they can possibly be. And then, when we go off the chains and get very wacky in certain episodes, we really bring that cinematic touch to that as well."





XILAM PRESENTS



A FILM BY KAN MUFTIC PRODUCED BY MARC DU PONTAVICE
A XILAM STUDIO PRODUCTION
STORY BY KAN MUFTIC WRITTEN BY VIVIENNE HARVEY





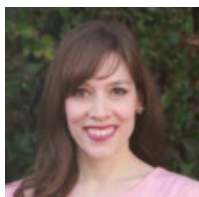
A Topsy Turvy Treat

A descendent of Lewis Carroll's charming heroine gets her own Disney animated show titled *Alice's Wonderland Bakery*.
By Karen Idelson

Unbirthdays. Rabbit holes. Talking door-knobs. Disney has embraced the wonderfully topsy turvy world of *Alice in Wonderland* as a beloved film and multiple park rides in Anaheim, Paris and Tokyo. This year, Lewis Carroll's timeless story has inspired a new Disney Junior series, *Alice's Wonderland Bakery*, that focuses on a descendent of the original Alice and her adventures as an inspired and adventurous chef.

Executive producer Chelsea Beyl and co-executive producer and art director Frank Montagna recently talked to *Animation Magazine* about modernizing Alice and setting up a world where she brings together her friends around the food that she makes. The duo says they knew they wanted to include the feelings of curiosity and discovery that so many audiences loved in the 1951 film, which was directed by Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson and Hamilton Luske.

"You think about Alice as a character and she's very fearless and curious as she goes through all these places in Wonderland," says Beyl, who also took inspiration from her sister, a pastry chef. "That was a really wonderful quality that I wanted to make sure carried



"This show is for a modern audience and kids who haven't seen the original movie. We wanted to give them a new look, but also still hold on to those iconic imagery and colors."

— Exec producer Chelsea Beyl

over for our new, reimagined, modern Alice, because I think kids really connect to her curiosity and also the determination and to keep trying, just like Alice kept trying to find her way through Wonderland."

Baking as a Superpower

Beyl adds, "Our Alice in *Alice's Wonderland Bakery* does the same thing. But of course, now she's doing that through food and baking and recipes. Baking is her superpower. Also, for our show, I wanted Alice to have that family



Return to Wonderland: A descendent of the original Alice and her madcap sidekicks enjoy a magical bakery in the new Disney Junior show.



'If you're doing an Alice in Wonderland show, the audience is going to be dying to see the Cheshire Cat. That is not a generational shift!'

— Art director & co-exec producer Frank Montagna

of friends. I think kids can see themselves in one of the other characters, whether it's Hattie, who's a little wacky, or Rosa, the princess of hearts. There's also Fergie, who is a white rabbit who's very loyal and a little frantic, but he will do anything for Alice."

The design team found creative ways to merge the production design of the original film with the setting of the new series. The two blended in interesting ways.

"It was just such a fun thing to create this bakery that was unlike anything anybody's ever seen," says Montagna. "It's more of a workshop than an actual bakery and there are things in it like a giant mixer, a talking oven and a pantry that has a rabbit hole element— When she goes into the pantry, she actually descends and floats and grabs what she needs. So, it was really fun to find a way to incorporate the baking element and it just seemed like a natural fit."

The show also packs some formidable voice talent. The performers include Donald Faison (*Scrubs*) as Harry the March Hare, Craig Ferguson as Doorknob, Jack Stanton as Fergie the White Rabbit, Jon Secada as the King of Hearts, *SNL* alums Vanessa Bayer and Bobby Moynihan as Tweedle Do and Tweedle Don't, and Libby Rue in the title role of Alice.

Composer John Kavanagh, who worked on *Sofia the First* and *Elena of Avalor*, contributes original songs that bring the same "emotional storytelling through music" to this series that distinguishes his work, according to Beyl. The executive producer is excited for audiences to hear several signature songs created just for the series.

As Beyl and Montagna discussed the look of the show they referenced the concept art of the legendary artist Mary Blair, who created concept art for *Alice in Wonderland*, *Cinderella*

and *Peter Pan*. Her color choices and ideas inspired details in the new series.

"Obviously, when people think of the Disney version of Alice, they think of that blue and white," says Montagna. "So, we had to start with that because it's just so much of what audiences know and love about Alice. But then we gave Alice her own outline. We pushed it a bit and made it fun. It's like checkerboard patterns and these swirl patterns that sort of give her a little bit more of an edgy but still cute vibe. When we were creating the show, we kept saying to everyone, we don't want it to be a storybook land. It's not a fairytale land. It's Wonderland. In this world, when you walk into a room you're going to see that everything is upside down."

He adds, "It's all very matter of fact, like it wouldn't be any other way. In this world, there's no pixie dust. If you eat a cake and it makes you grow, it's just matter of fact. It is just that way. In the beginning of the process with all of the board artists and the designers, we decided: let's create a world that everyone remembers from the film, but we're reinventing it and it's very unique and special to this character and to this show."

Production on the show began during the pandemic and, initially, a small crew of about 10 people at Disney Television Animation did the design, boarding and layout for the series. Later on, ICON Creative Studio was brought on as an animation partner. The studio is located in Vancouver and has a team of about 60 animators working on the first season of the show.

Familiar Eccentrics

During development, it became clear that certain supporting characters needed to become part of the series. Even if the preschool audience that was being introduced to Alice might

not miss them, adult fans watching with them might be looking for a Cheshire Cat or a White Rabbit. They are also a big part of Alice's journey.

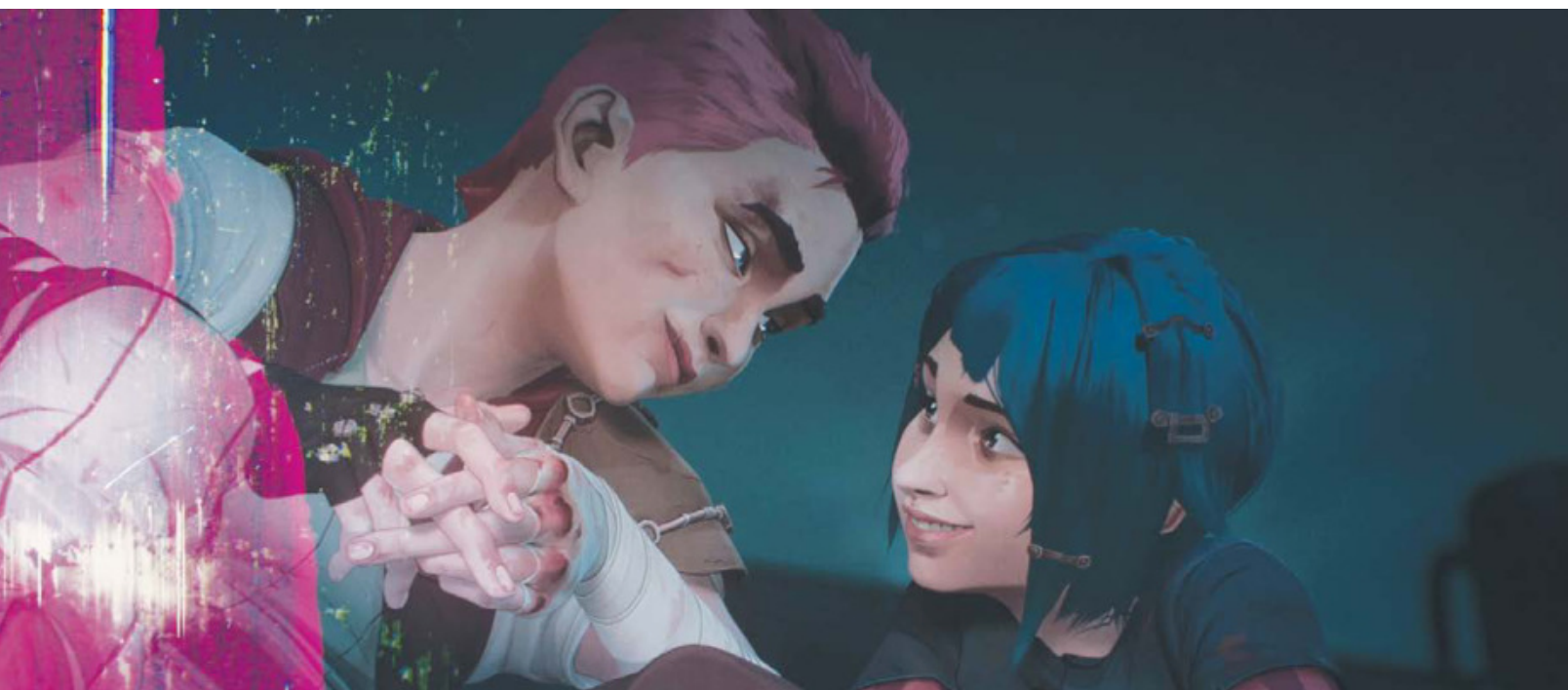
"Once we had our main characters approved, we would go in and develop what each character looked like, very methodically picking out the characters we needed and adding them to the show," says Montagna. "Of course, we knew we needed a Queen of Hearts, a Mad Hatter character, a White Rabbit character. And those characters all had to fit with what we're doing with this Alice and this series. The book and the movie really helped inform what we needed to design. If you're doing an *Alice in Wonderland* show, the audience is going to be dying to see the Cheshire Cat. That is not a generational shift. He is just the Cheshire Cat. He's magical enough. He's lived there. He's like Yoda. He's forever. We just did our spin and made him more comedic, and a little bit more kid friendly, but he's still the same character."

Adds Beyl: "This is for a modern audience and kids who haven't seen the original movie. We wanted to give them a new look, but also still hold on to the iconic imagery and the colors. Alice is in a little chef's coat and sneakers, but she still has the blue dress. So, when you look at her, you know who that is. And then it's the same thing with our Mad Hatter character. He's got elements from the original Mad Hatter. And in the colors and design of all those characters around Alice, we were definitely inspired by Mary Blair and the movie."

Though the show came together during lockdown, both Beyl and Montagna found themselves delighted to be creating a new way to tell Alice's story.

"Chelsea and I always joke that we never worked in an office together — but we were lucky enough to get paired up on this series and then got to spend the pandemic in Wonderland," says Montagna. ♦

Alice's Wonderland Bakery premieres Feb. 9 at 10:30 a.m. on Disney Junior and Disney Channel. The first few episodes will also be available to stream on Disney+.



Legendary Artistry

The team behind Riot Games and Fortiche's *League of Legends* series *Arcane* discuss the secrets of their runaway hit show.
By Tom McLean

Animated shows based on video games have come a long way since the early days of *Pac-Man* and *Donkey Kong*. The success of Riot Games' *Arcane* on Netflix (which became a runaway hit and earned nine Annie nominations) has certainly opened a new chapter in the history of gaming-inspired animated content.

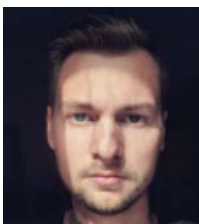
Based on the multiplayer online battle arena game *League of Legends*, launched in 2009, *Arcane* is Riot Games' first animated series, produced in partnership with Paris-based Fortiche Productions. The nine-episode series debuted last November with a rare 100 percent approval rating

on aggregator Rotten Tomatoes, and earned an immediate second season order.

The series' complex setting is divided between the utopian Piltover and the oppressed Zaun, and tells the tale of two sisters whose loyalty to each other is tested on the way to becoming iconic

champions. It stars Hailee Steinfeld and Ella Purnell as the sisters Vi and Jinx; Kevin Alejandro as Jayce and Katie Leung as Caitlyn.

Riot veterans Christian Linke and Alex Yee created and wrote the story, with Linke serving as showrunner and executive producer and Yee as



'We knew that there was going to be an expectation that every game character that we involved needs to have a satisfying arc and storyline — even if they're side characters.'

— **Creator/exec producer Christian Linke**
(Creative Director, Riot Games)





Cool Characters:
Arcane creators Christian Linke and Alex Yee decided to focus on Jinx and Vi, the two dynamic sisters at the heart of the Netflix show.

'Linke's idea was to find the right balance between realistic animation and cartoon animation. Since we're dealing with semi-realistic characters, we wanted to convey weight.'

— **Animation director Barthélemy Maunoury (Co-Director/Head of animation, Fortiche)**

co-executive producer. Both have extensive experience in video games, but *Arcane* — for which they were nominated for an Annie for outstanding writing in an animated TV or broadcast episode — is the first animation project for each.

High-Fidelity World

Inspiration for *Arcane* came from a desire to delve into the storytelling potential of *League of Legends* in ways that the game could not. "It's just a game where you don't really get a chance to actually experience the story for any of the characters," Yee says. "We always felt this responsibility to deliver a higher-fidelity version of the world for those players."

Arcane's first season has nine episodes, each running about 40 minutes — requiring six hours of story. The game's depth, however, prompted the producers to both pack each episode with story and to find ways to get into the story the characters fans most wanted to see.

Yee says they ended up focusing on Vi and Jinx because the story of how the sisters became enemies had not been told. "There was this mystery that we came to the table with," he says. "Then we built around there, starting in that same region, looking at the other characters who are available."

"We knew that there was going to be an expectation that every game character that we in-

volved needs to have a satisfying arc and storyline — even if they're side characters," says Linke. "We worked very, very hard to give all of them a true progression — not just utilize them as tools in a story. I think it was very important to us."

Heading up *Arcane's* animation direction at Fortiche is Barthélemy Maunoury — nominated for the Annie along with Fortiche co-founders Pascal Charrue and Arnaud Delord for outstanding direction in a TV or broadcast episode — who was skeptical about the project until Linke pitched the project. "I was just blown away by his vision, his ambition — and that changed the whole thing for me," Maunoury says.

Linke's clear vision helped define how the show ended up being made. "His idea was to find the right balance between realistic animation and cartoon animation," says Maunoury. "Since we're dealing with semi-realistic characters, we wanted to convey weight. And also, it's a drama, so it's important for the characters to feel real."

Eschewing motion-capture as a solution, they researched live-action films to define the characters and develop a style of animation that matched the vision, Maunoury says. "Having said that, we don't hesitate to sometimes bend our rules," he says. "Sometimes we go for something a little bit more extreme, a little bit more animated or a bit more stylized. And sometimes we

go for something a bit more real."

Maunoury says animators were each given a lot of freedom to bring their own ideas to each shot or sequence. Since there were about 80 or 90 animators working on the team, their preferences on creating or using reference varied quite a bit. Sequences were typically brainstormed into storyboards and animatics, and assigned to teams of five to seven animators, working under a lead animator, he says.

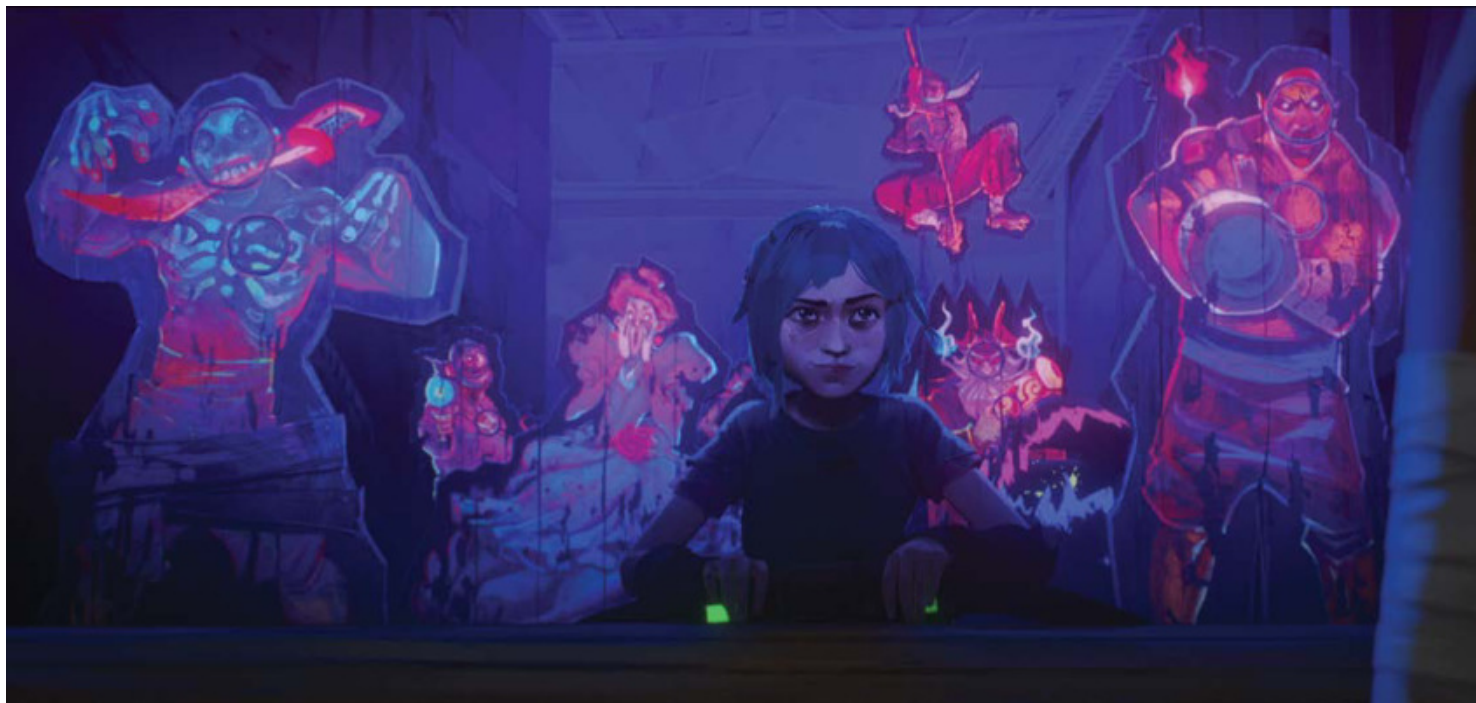
Animators had access to a reference room with cameras and props, and could shoot as much or as little reference as they needed. Shots went to layout and approved blocking shots were then turned into final animation, with team members set a quota of producing 0.8 seconds of animation per day, Maunoury says.

Since *League of Legends* is a battle game, the series required plenty of fight sequences that had to fulfill fans' expectations. That was an area where Maunoury says they were able to play more with the medium, and develop fighting styles for each character. For example, Jinx is a fast and sharp fighter, so the animators took some cues from anime, using smears and multiple arms to make it snappy and fun. Vi, meanwhile, is more of a boxer, and her fight sequences were animated in a more realistic way, Maunoury says.

Fortiche also mixed 2D and 3D animation to give *Arcane* a detailed and textured look. Maunoury says the characters are all animated using 3D models and rigs, with 2D animation used to add texture and effects like smoke, water, fire, dust, etc. The backgrounds are painted in 2D, he says, and he cites the efforts of the show's compositing team for bringing it all together seamlessly.

"When you're working in games, your job is

FEATURES



more to support the experience of the player, and make sure that everything creatively that happens with the world and the characters is built in service of the connection between the game and that player," Yee points out.

Adjusting to animation pipelines and solving production problems also required the crew to find its own solutions wherever possible, Linke says. "It was a very elaborate process, because we really always had to find our own answer," he says. "It just didn't really work out-of-the-box for production on Arcane."

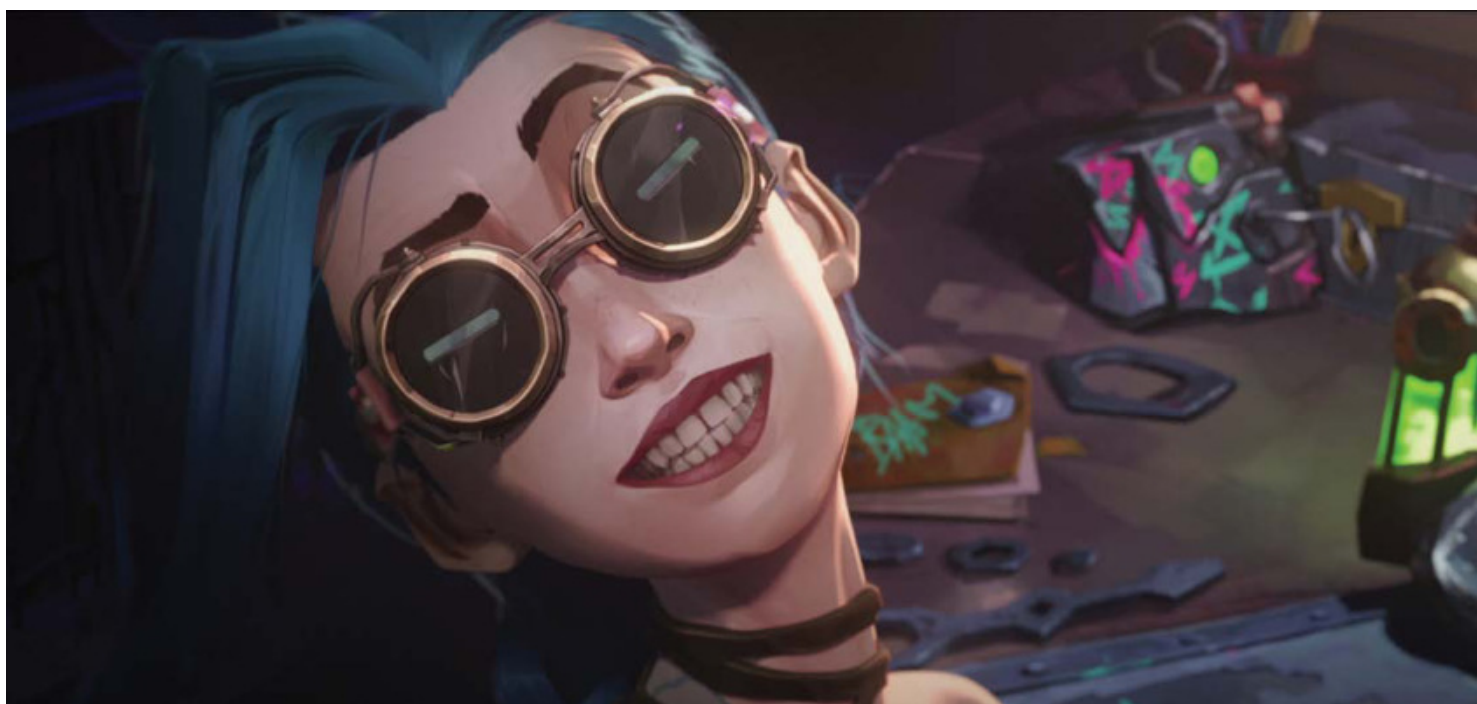
Linke says Fortiche was a clear choice for

an animation partner, citing their previous collaborations, the look of the studio's work, and the attention its work shows to aspects like camera work. "Their choices for camera were always a bit more daring," Linke says. The result ran counter to the traditional animation approach of prioritizing clarity, but opened things up to other possibilities. "Can we do more here? Can we have a certain choice, especially for the camera, where it says more about the characters, or it adds a certain dynamic feeling to it, or has a certain kind of creative statement? That was always very, very important to (Fortiche), and was something that

I think a good amount of people that we had in L.A. had to get used to, but also started to fall in love with over time."

And there's no more proof that the animation field has taken to that approach than the nine Annie noms and other accolades the show has received. For Linke and Yee, it couldn't be a better introduction to the animation world. "It feels like the chill side of Hollywood," Yee says. "It's a really fun community to be engaged with." ♦

The first season of *Arcane* is currently streaming on Netflix.





PROUDLY CONGRATULATES ALL ANNIE AWARD NOMINEES AND

ARCANE

LEAGUE OF LEGENDS

NOMINATIONS

Best TV/Media – General Audience

EPISODE: WHEN THESE WALLS COME TUMBLING DOWN

Best Direction – TV/Media

EPISODE: THE MONSTER YOU CREATED

PASCAL CHARRUE, ARNAUD DELORD, BARTHELEMY MAUNOURY

Best Writing – TV/Media

CHRISTIAN LINKE, ALEX YEE

Best Voice Acting – TV/Media

ELLA PURNELL (JINX)

Best FX – TV/Media

EPISODE: OIL AND WATER

GUILLAUME DEGROOTE, AURÉLIEN RESSEN COURT, MARTIN TOUZÉ, FRÉDÉRIC MACÉ, JÉRÔME DUPRÉ

Best Character Animation – TV/Media

EPISODE: THE MONSTER YOU CREATED

LÉA CHERVET

Best Character Design – TV/Media

EPISODE: SOME MYSTERIES ARE BETTER LEFT UNSOLVED

EVAN MONTEIRO

Best Production Design – TV/Media

EPISODE: HAPPY PROGRESS DAY!

JULIEN GEORGEL, AYMERIC KEVIN, ARNAUD BAUDRY

Best Storyboarding – TV/Media

SIMON ANDRIVEAU



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Tales of Two Russian Princesses

Wizart Animation is unveiling two top-notch family features, *The Snow Queen & The Princess* and *The Warrior Princess*, this year.

This is shaping up to be a very busy year for Russia's award-winning studio Wizart Animation. This month, the studio will be bringing two highly anticipated titles to the European Film Market in Berlin: *The Warrior Princess* and *The Snow Queen & The Princess*. Both films are slated to premiere in 2022 – the exciting new chapter in the *The Snow Queen* universe will arrive in theaters in May, while the multi-faceted epic offering *The Warrior Princess* is slated for the end of the year.

A Fifth Tentpole

Last year, Wizart had a great run with its *The Snow Queen* spin-off *Tales of Wonder Keepers*, which was released worldwide as an iQIYI Original series. The 26 x 12 min. CG-animated series became the most popular children's

title on iQIYI, China's leading VOD service, and was also one of the streamer's top 15 overall offerings. (The platform boasts over 500 million monthly active users, who consume 6 billion hours of content each month.)

"We have great plans for our new feature *The Snow Queen & The Princess*," says Vladimir Nikolaev, Wizart's founder & CEO and the film's producer. "The movie will have a wide release in Russia/CIS beginning on May 26. We have major licensing deals on their way to support the new release such as stationery, dolls and books. We're also planning strong international releases in France, South Korea and Turkey around that time. We are also looking forward to announcing the following new releases in other territories with our loyal and stable partners from the previous features. Previous install-

ments were sold to more than 150 countries."

Nikolaev points out that the property's audience has grown with each movie in the series. "The production quality bar has also been raised by our studio," he notes. "*The Snow Queen* audience has been growing since the release of the first Snow Queen movie and the production quality bar of our studio, too. Our fifth movie in the franchise will have a completely new look, and the story will center on a completely new character. Probably, this time, we are going farther from the original fairy tale than ever before."

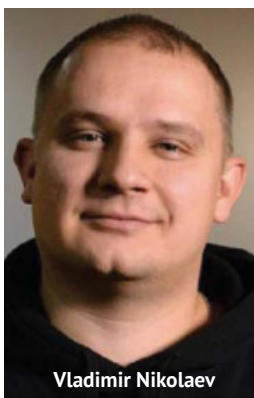
In the new movie, the Snow Queen will be back, but the focus of the story is her carefree and misbehaving daughter, Ila. "Kai, Gerda and Ila will embark on a new journey to save the entire world from global freezing," says Nikolaev. "Needless to say,





their adventure will be dangerous, full of challenges, magical and ultimately a lot of fun to watch."

Wizart's other big movie for the year is *The Warrior Princess*, which centers on the extraordinary and brave Princess Mila, who is kidnapped by an



Vladimir Nikolaev

evil sorcerer. However, she will not wait to be rescued by the handsome prince: instead, she faces her captors by wreaking havoc at the sorcerer's castle while plotting her escape. Her fiancé Ronan is also witty and strong in spirit, but he has to fight the opponents for Mila's heart.

Timeless Stories

"The main story was inspired by folklore, epics and popular stories that have been passed down for many years and are familiar to many generations," notes Nikolaev. "We're adjusting these unique local stories to make them relat-



able for people of all ages from anywhere on the globe. That's the magic of fairy tales: Not only do they offer us a brief escape from reality, they also have the power to provide morality lessons for both children and their parents."

Wizart has also been busy on the technical front. Nikolaev points out that the studio released its new in-house pipeline called Wizart DCC Platform in 2021. "This software addresses many previous problems and has been very valuable for our team," says the CEO. "Artists can work on several shots at the same time or create complex hair designs and change the shape, length and

overall visual approach to hair and fur design. Without our in-house toolset, these kinds of technical tasks would be a cross-departmental, synchronization nightmare."

Nikolaev says he's looking forward to bringing the latest projects from the talented artists and technical teams working at Wizart. "We have new storylines, cutting-edge animation and exciting characters to introduce to the world, and we can't wait for new audiences to discover the magic of our studio." ♦

For more info, visit www.wizartanimation.com.





Creation Unleashed

Our columnist Josh Selig gives us an exclusive peek at his entertaining new show *Peaches & Creaminal*.

Does it trouble you that this isn't a real interview and you are, in fact, writing both your part and the interviewer's questions?

Josh: No, it doesn't bother me at all. As Walt Whitman once said, "Every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you."

Then let's proceed. I know you've got a new dog show you'd like to talk about but, before we get into that, can you tell us how you go about creating shows?

Well, I wake up, I drink coffee, and then ideas begin to rise up in my mind like bubbles in a fish tank. The bubbles usually contain things like shoes, pinecones, tugboats, turtles, dandelions, snacks, kangaroos and other assorted childhood detritus. Then, through a process that is unclear to me, they all come together like a compost heap and produce an array of gases and nutrients. On the good days, these will evolve into an animated kids' show. And on the bad days, I just sit there in the stink.

So, you're largely passive in your own creative process?

Yes, I've found that most things go better when I stay out of them.

Why have you focused for so long on making preschool shows?

On Christmas Eve, Pope Francis said, "That is where God is, in littleness." I would agree. Also, a part of me remains lodged in my childhood like a Big Wheel stuck in a snowbank.

What is the hardest part of making a preschool show?

Not losing sight of what's important to a four-year old. These days, I see a lot of well-made preschool shows that are missing something. They're like empty mansions. Good craftsmanship cannot replace a beating heart. And, conversely, when a show has a strong heartbeat,

the craftsmanship is almost irrelevant. Preschool shows must be made of love.

Speaking of love, you can now tell us a little bit about your new animated show!

It's my first 6-9 comedy. It's called *Peaches & Creaminal* and it's about an outgoing girl from Shanghai named Peaches and her rather large, unsavory bulldog named Creaminal. I created it with my wife, Chen. Peaches is based on Chen and Creaminal is based on, well, me. Peaches won a trip around the world and her parents said she could go as long as she took Creaminal with her. So, in every episode, they travel to a new country and things unravel.

Who did your designs?

The show was designed by two brothers I met at KingstOOOn in Jamaica, Gary and Kenny Plummer. They're brilliant and they've been an absolute pleasure to work with.

You've always worked with different designers, haven't you?

Yes, I've always depended on the kindness of great designers. I consider bad design to be one of the seven deadly sins of kids' television.

And what are the other six?

Voting on creative decisions. Not being prepared for a pitch. Confusing a show bible with a licensing deck. Mistaking profitable content for good content. Assuming good content will be profitable. Not filing your music cue sheets. Believing tax credits are more important than talent. And thinking "I'm a Little Teapot" is in the public domain.

That's eight!

I've never been a math person.

Music has always played a big role in your shows. Who's doing your music?

We're working with Larry Hochman, who I

worked with on *Wonder Pets!* Larry's a great fit for *Peaches & Creaminal* because he understands comedy and he's a *mensh*. Plus, he's got a Tony and a bunch of Emmys, which never hurts when pitching a new show.

And what's your strategy for pitching the show?

We're using the same strategy I've used my whole life, which is to pitch it to everyone on planet Earth and see who bites. We have early interest in both Beijing and the U.S. so we're feeling very optimistic. The whole point of China Bridge Content is to create original projects which will sit comfortably in both of these large, important markets.

Have you always been so willing to put yourself out there and pitch?

No, I used to be a very shy person. I was too afraid to pitch my own shows. But years ago, when I was working at *Sesame Street*, I was riding in a taxi and the driver handed me a copy of his band's CD and said, "If I'm not for myself, then who will be for me?" That stayed with me. So, I left *Sesame Street* and decided to do whatever I could to get my own shows made.

Including interviewing yourself?

Yes. Every little bit helps. And to any new creator out there I would say this: If you have a show nibbling on your arm, go take it outside. Just like our dog Mike, you'll feel relieved.

Josh Selig is the creator of *Wonder Pets!*, *P. King Duckling*, *The Dog & Pony Show*, *3rd & Bird*,



***Small Potatoes* and many other preschool shows around the world. He is the President of China Bridge Content and the former CEO of Little Airplane Productions. And he just became a dad.**



10 ANNIE AWARD
—NOMINATIONS INCL.—
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

CRITICS CHOICE
—AWARD NOMINATION—
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

5 VES AWARD
—NOMINATIONS INCL.—
BEST VFX IN ANIM. FEATURE

HOLLYWOOD CRITICS ASSOC.
—FILM AWARD NOMINATION—
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

*"A fable that succeeds on many levels,
from its rich sense of atmosphere to its dynamic female leads."*

THE WRAP

"This is a film that knows how to soar."

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

Disney
RAYA
AND
THE LAST DRAGON

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Business as Usual in Bordeaux?

The 2022 edition of Cartoon Movie offers a wonderfully eclectic mix of high-brow projects and charming family fare.

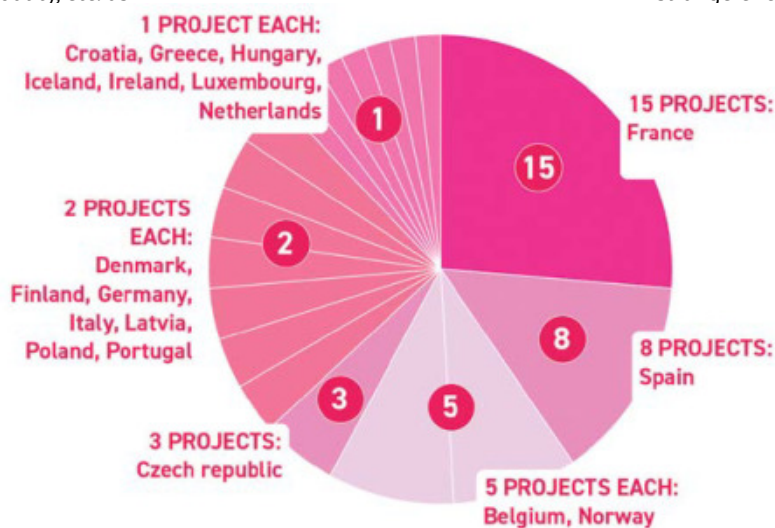
Despite all our best hopes, 2022 continues to be an uncertain year for global animation events. Nevertheless, the hard-working and determined folks behind the annual Cartoon Movie in Bordeaux, France are optimistic about the 24th edition of the event, scheduled to take place March 8-10.

This year's pitchfest (which will hopefully be in-person and not virtual), will be spotlighting 57 animated movies in various stages of completion — in concept, development, production and sneak preview. According to event organizers, over 77 hours of animation (with a total budget of €266.3 million or \$300 million U.S.) will be spotlighted.

Cartoon Movie's general director Annick Maes says she is blown away by the variety and quality of the selected features this year. "We seem to have a lot of movies tackling serious issues that face our world today — such as immigration, racism, social equality, etc. as well as strong features with female protagonists and people of color," she says. "More than ever before, animation is used by inspired producers and directors to tell stories in a better way and reach a wider audience."

She adds, "These innovative and creative features are the stars of Cartoon Movie. European producers dare to innovate in terms of modern and unusual graphic styles, as well as reaching out to new target groups such as young adults. For example, 21 of our movies this year (37%) are made for young adults/adults. Animation works aimed at teenagers and adults have multiplied in recent years. They are able to address new topics and open up exciting possibilities."

This year's rich selection of films are backed by 19 main producer countries. Regionally, Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway) are bringing 10, while another nine hail from



countries in Central & Eastern Europe (Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Poland).

Family movies dominate the selection with 28 projects (49%), followed remarkably close by stories for Young Adults/Adults (21, 37%), with another single project aimed specifically at Teenagers and seven (12%) created for Children. Most projects are currently in development (41%) or in concept (33%), with another 14% in

production and 12% ready for a sneak preview.

Among the familiar names presenting new projects this year are:

Director **Rémi Chayé** (*Calamity*) will present his latest movie, *Fleur*, which is about an impoverished girl who becomes a talented lyricist and singer during the Belle Époque period in Paris.

Acclaimed Spanish helmer/graphic novelist **Alberto Vázquez**'s much-anticipated new pic *Unicorn Wars* is also set to make a splash.

Claude Barras' (*My Life as a Zucchini*) second feature is titled *You're Not the One I Expected*. The stop-motion project follows a family whose newborn daughter has Down syndrome.

Romanian auteur **Anca Damian** (*Marona's Fantastic Tale*, *The Island*) returns with her third Cartoon Movie title, *Starseed*, about a young albino girl's life in Zimbabwe and a strange encounter in the forest.

Edmunds Jansons (*Jacob, Mimmi and the Talking Dogs*) returns to Cartoon Movie with *Born Happy*, about a young girl who loses her younger brother when her family goes to the rainforest on summer break.

José Miguel Ribeiro (*Paso a Paso*) will present *Nayola*, about a woman who goes to Angola during the civil war in search of her husband who was reported missing.

French studio **Xilam** (*I Lost My Hand*) will showcase its new feature *The Migrant*, directed by **Kan Muftic**, about a brave young woman's treacherous journey from Syria to the west.

Anthony Roux (*Wakfu*, *Dofus*) and **Jean-Jacques Denis** (Ankama Studio) will present *Princess Reinette*, which charts the magical adventures of a very tiny princess. ♦

For more info, visit cartoon-media.eu/movie.



8 ANNIE AWARD
— NOMINATIONS INCL. —
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

CRITICS CHOICE
— AWARD NOMINATION —
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

TOP TEN
FILM OF THE YEAR
AP LINDSEY BAHR

4 VES AWARD
— NOMINATIONS INCL. —
BEST VFX IN ANIM. FEATURE

HOLLYWOOD CRITICS ASSOC.
— FILM AWARD NOMINATION —
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

"A BEGUILING FABLE OF FRIENDSHIP AND DISCOVERY SET ON, AND OFF,
THE GLITTERING COASTLINE OF THE ITALIAN RIVIERA
IN THE MID-20TH CENTURY." —THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, JOE MORGENTHAU



CONSIDER
EVERY MOMENT

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BEST ANIMATED FEATURE



EVENT SPOTLIGHT



A Cat for All Seasons

Terry Pratchett's crafty feline hero is ready for his animation debut in *The Amazing Maurice*.

Fans of the great British fantasy author Terry Pratchett have been waiting patiently for the upcoming feature adaptation of his acclaimed book *The Amazing Maurice (and his Educated Rodents)*. In March, attendees of France's Cartoon Movie event will get a sneak peek at the much-anticipated movie, which centers on a streetwise cat who uses his own band of talking rats to make money from unsuspecting villagers. Directed by Toby Genkel (*Yakari: A Spectacular Journey*, *All Creatures Big and Small*) with a script by Terry Rossio (*Aladdin*, *Shrek*), the movie features the voices of Hugh Laurie (Maurice) Emilia Clark, David Thewlis, Himesh Patel and Gemma Arterton, David Tennant and Hugh Bonneville, among others.

The animation is produced by Germany's Ulysses Filmproduktion (producer: Emely Christians) and co-produced by U.K.'s Cantilever Media (producer: Andrew Baker), with additional animation provided by Sheffield-based studio Red Star 3D.

"I am really thrilled with the film's beautiful animation and what we were able to do with a European movie's budget," says Emely Christians, whose many credits include *Luis and the Aliens* and *Little Bird's Big Adventures* (a.k.a. *A Stork's Journey*). "Our goal was to be true to the spirit of Terry Pratchett's much-loved creation and we really wanted to honor his vision. I hope the viewers will get the ultimate message of the movie, which is that we should be able to live in peace together and not fight for our own selfish needs."

A World Unlike Others

British producer Andrew Baker, who has been a lifelong fan of Pratchett's magical books, says he was thrilled when he first read the script by Rossio. "I thought he had really captured the characters that Terry had created, and we were very fortunate to team up with Emely and the team at Ulysses on the project," he tells us. "Carter Goodrich's brilliant early character designs were also a huge asset as we set out to make the movie. We then brought the project to the team at Red Star (*StarDog and TurboCat*) who did a fantastic job of collaborating with the German team to create the vivid CG animation production." Go-



'Everyone who is involved with this movie are genuine fans of *The Amazing Maurice*, both the film and the book'

— Producer Andrew Baker, Cantilever Media founder/CEO



Fascinating Feline:
The Amazing Maurice features the voices of A-list British actors including Hugh Laurie, Emilia Clarke and David

odrigh's credits include *Ratatouille*, *Despicable Me*, *Hotel Transylvania* and *Ron's Gone Wrong*.

"We had the comfort blanket of knowing that our German partners were massively experienced," adds Baker. "They had made a lot of great animated movies before, and had their own studio (Studio Raketa) on this project, so we felt that even with the challenges that COVID had introduced into our lives, we had the two different studios working on the project in two different countries, so that one could pick up the slack if the need arose."

For the film's director, it was also important to make sure the movie preserved the spirit of what Pratchett had envisioned with his words. "We wanted to build the world along the same lines as he had imagined it," says Genkel. "We

went for what makes this imagined universe so unique. We even made the sets accordingly — there are straight lines and everything is a bit offset and quite cinematic. We are all very proud of the movie. I hope the audience is entertained completely for 85 minutes. Pratchett had something important to say about humanity and the importance of democracy and diversity and showing respect for one another. In addition to all the fun and amazing imagery, I hope audiences can take home this message as well."

Baker agrees, "One of the reasons I'm a huge Terry Pratchett fan is because he tells stories in such an unusual way," he explains. "He makes you look at the world differently. That's how he took the classic Pied Piper story and turned it around so we have the cat and the rats scamming villages. That's also why everyone who is involved with this movie are genuine fans of *Maurice*, the film and the book — from all the brilliant stars we have as the voices of the characters to all the animation supervisors, artists, etc. People were willing to take a pay cut to be part of this project. We hope audiences will appreciate this movie and fall in love with the characters and look at our world quite differently afterwards!" ♦

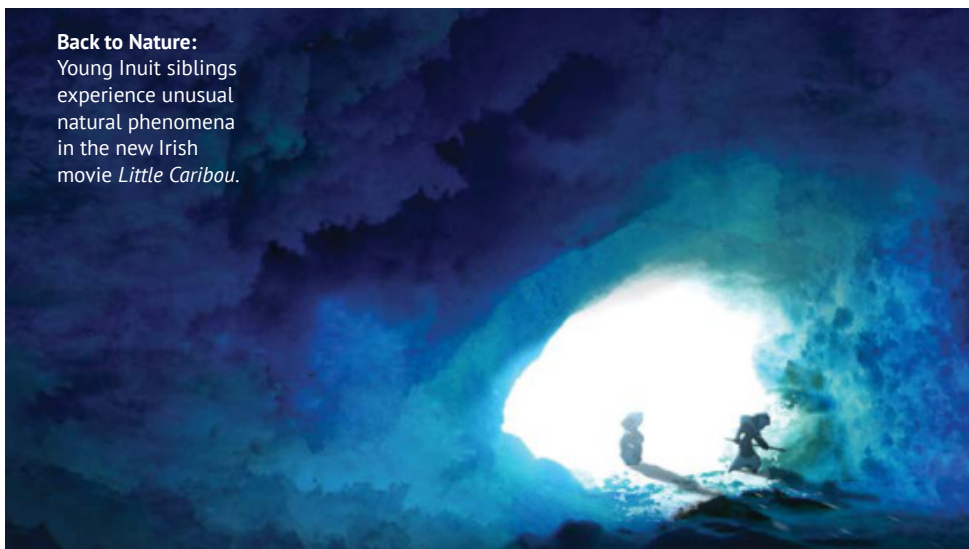
***The Amazing Maurice* is one of 57 features showcased at the Cartoon Movie event in March. The film will be released later this year worldwide, marking the book's 20th anniversary.**



An Inuit Odyssey

Irish director Barry O'Donoghue takes us behind the scenes of the new animated feature, *Little Caribou*.

Back to Nature:
Young Inuit siblings experience unusual natural phenomena in the new Irish movie *Little Caribou*.

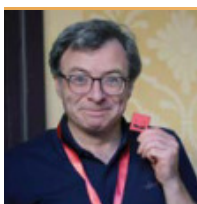


Barry O'Donoghue, the director and producer of the new 2D-animated feature *Little Caribou*, recalls how he and his sister were interested in the natural world from an early age. "When we were growing up in the countryside she would often rescue birds, and later worked a little in wildlife rescue while studying zoology," says the Dublin-based animation veteran. "She then went on to become a doctor and now helps humans, too. It was this combination of concern for and interest in the natural world that formed the seed of the story for our film."

O'Donoghue's charming movie, which will be premiering at this year's Cartoon Movie event in France, tells an environmentally themed story about a young Inuit sister and brother living inside the Arctic Circle who discover some very unusual creatures one day. "I wanted to explore that change in sibling relationships over time where they can progress from simply being competitive as kids to something else as adults – in my case, being in absolute awe of her as a human being ... In our story, the boy's sister goes from being a bit of a nuisance to him at the start to a genuine hero for him in the course of a couple of days, transforming their relationship for the better, forever."

The filmmaker began developing the story back in 2005. He visited the city of Tromsø inside the Arctic Circle in Norway in early 2006, which gave him first-hand experience of the landscape, the weather, husky dog sledding and the aurora borealis. It took another 10 years or so to put the financing together to actually make the movie.

"The collaborative process has been the best part of the experience," he tells us. "As much as one can improvise on an animated feature, that is what we did – especially in relation to the art direction (mostly by Ciaran Duffy) and char-



"There is so much going wrong in the natural world due to human consumption at an industrial level nowadays, I felt it was important to still make the point that we can all make a difference."

— Director Barry O'Donoghue

acter performances. Most characters had a single animator, and the idea was to empower them to own the character and performance within the loose guidelines of the story. Seeing them add things to the designs or performances that I would never have thought of in a million years was always a thrill. The same thing applied to collaborating with Cathy Davey on the original music and our two young vocal talents Emthe Skandfer Solskinnsbakk and Erle Solskinnsbakk Skandfer."

Natural Wonders

According to O'Donoghue, the natural world was the primary visual inspiration. "Northern Norway in winter was a massive influence in terms of becoming familiar with the weather, landscapes and light conditions, including the aurora borealis, that we wanted to fill the film with," he says. "We also took a boat trip to a remote island off the Irish coast called Skellig Michael which gave us the sense of isolation and closeness to nature our characters would be feeling in the story. Of course, we also pored over various books about the Arctic as well as dozens of nature documentaries to become more familiar with the location and wildlife for the story."

The animation was produced over several years starting with teams at the Barley Films studio in Ireland, first in Dublin and later in the small fishing village of Dingle, then in South Korea with a team headed by Mike Nguyen at July Films, in Spain with a team at The Glow

Animation Studio and then with freelance animators in Scotland, Madrid and London. The animation was done using TVPaint, Toon Boom and, of course, pencil and paper. "The voices were recorded in Norway with Endre Skandfer from Fabeljord Studio who was the person who had originally suggested Tromsø as a location to visit when we both met at a children's film festival in India in 2005," adds the director. "Overall, there were about 85 people over the course of the whole production with no more than a dozen or so at any one time."

O'Donoghue, who has worked on big studio pictures such as *The Iron Giant* and *Osmosis Jones*, says he grew up being inspired by animated TV shows such as *Bagpuss* and *The Clangers*, as well as Cosgrove Hall's *Wind in the Willows* and Aardman's early *Morph* series and *Wallace & Gromit* shorts. "Later, seeing the work of Joanna Quinn (*Girls' Night Out*) and Frédéric Back (*The Man Who Planted Trees*) was quite a revelation, too," he notes. "After 24 years in the industry I have been lucky enough to have worked with several people that I have huge respect for, including Richie Baneham (*Avatar*), Brenda Chapman (*Brave*), Eric Goldberg (*Fantasia 2000*), Mike Nguyen (*My Little World*), Sydney Padua (*Agricultural Report*) and Fergal Reilly (*The Angry Birds*). I'm always inspired by their creativity, integrity, honest feedback, teamwork and especially their sense of humor!" ♦

For more info, visit barleyfilms.net.

EVENT SPOTLIGHT



A Dinosaur's Meta Journey

Polish director Wojtek Wawszczyk plays with different genres and formats in the new live-action/animation hybrid feature *Diplodocus*.

Several years in the making, the new animated feature *Diplodocus* from Poland's Human Ark studio is ready for its Cartoon Movie sneak peek this year. The family comedy is inspired by classic 1980s comic books by Polish author Tadeusz Baranowski, which have sold over 2.5 million copies through the years. It tells the epic adventure of a small dinosaur, who has to find his missing parents, while also discovering that he actually lives inside a comic-book world.

Produced by Maks Sikora, the project is the second animated feature by Wojtek Wawszczyk (*George the Hedgehog*) who also wrote the script in collaboration with Mark Palmer (*The Penguins of Madagascar*, *Monsters vs. Aliens* and *Kim Possible*).

"When I was nine years old, I lived in a world cut off from color and the joy of life," says the film's director Wawszczyk. "Then, amidst the ubiquitous greyness, I came across this comic book, which was so different from what surrounded us: irrepressible in color, joyful, full of absurd humor, standing in opposition to the hard and depressing logic, strutting in the frames, inspiring everyone to dream and look ahead. That comic book was Baranowski's *Diplodocus Dragon's Journey*, and although it belonged to the '80s era, it hasn't lost its freshness. It was very important to me and many artists of



"We are hoping to offer audiences a movie that is missing from screens around the world. *Diplodocus* is a rich and eclectic film: It's a manifestation of the power of imagination, and an homage to the ability to play with form."

— Director Wojtek Wawszczyk

my generation. It encouraged me to draw, think outside the box and to tell my own stories."

The director mentions that when he was a kid, he was surrounded by devastating deprivation. But he adds, "Today, we live in a time of debilitating excess of soulless copies. Children have instant access to thousands of average movie productions based on the same formula. I believe that *Diplodocus* is a counterproposal to such hastily-made, clichéd 'clones'; It is one of the most ambitious ventures in the history of animation in the post-Communist Bloc countries."

Wawszczyk says he pays homage to many of the familiar benchmarks of '80s era film and pop culture in his movie. "The music combines a symphonic orchestra with synthesizers. We devote a lot of attention to camera work, with an excellent cinematographer, Jacek Podgórski, working with us. We showcase long takes and classic, nicely framed compositions."

The film's storyline exists on two levels — the world of the author and the universe of the

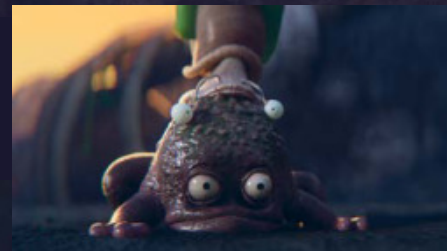
comic book. "It's a bit reminiscent of the classic movie *The NeverEnding Story* or the famous music video by A-ha, 'Take on Me,'" he notes. "I care about mixing techniques and I do it consciously. The author's world is actor-driven, and the comic-book world combines different animation techniques: gorgeous CG animation with spectacularly painted backgrounds. The visual designs of the characters directly refer to the cult comic books by Tadeusz Baranowski. All this creates an original hybrid of techniques, qualities and tastes. We are hoping to provide audiences with a movie that is missing from movie screens around the world."

He concludes, "*Diplodocus* is a rich and eclectic film: It's a manifestation of the power of imagination, and an homage to the ability to play with form. Moreover, it's made with passion and tenderness, despite countless difficulties and sometimes against common sense." ♦

For more info, visit human-ark.com.

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EVENT SPOTLIGHT



Modern Life Examined

The bold new Portuguese film *My Grandfather's Demons* mixes 2D and stop-motion animation.

The upcoming Portuguese feature *My Grandfather's Demons* is a bold, innovative offering that mixes different types of animation to tell a sophisticated and profound story. Directed by Nuno Beato through studio Sardinha em Lata and penned by Possidónio Cachapa, the film centers on the experiences of a woman who returns home after a long absence and seeks answers to a painful past with her family. According to the film's producer Diogo Carvalho, the project grew out of Beato's desire to explore the way we all live life — and how we are all exhausted by its demands to some extent.

"We were fortunate to have a great script by Possidónio Cachapa, and then we applied for development funding, which we won," says Carvalho. "After all the development was done we applied to production funding in Portugal that we also got. By this time, we knew we would need to find partners to co-produce the project. First came Spain with Caretos AIE, and soon we were joined by France's Midralgar."

The producer says this movie turned out to be the project of a lifetime for him. "Portugal has never produced an animated feature film, and there was no way I was not going to be part of it," he says. "The story is a universal one that, although it takes place in Portugal, touches upon many issues of today's world. It comments on



"The story is a universal one that, although it takes place in Portugal, touches upon many issues of today's world."

— Producer Diogo Carvalho

how we abandon smaller towns and the countryside for the big cities, to the rush, and have this kind of stressed modern lifestyle."

Plans for a New World

Carvalho believes that the global experiences with the pandemic have made the movie even more relevant today. "We have all had to rethink a lot of things in our lives and also really examine how we live, both in relation to the people around us and the environment," he points out. "Stop-motion animation is a passion, and working with such a talented team of animators and builders amplified it thousands of times. They built all those huge sets with such passion and detail. You can see these amazing puppets come to life frame by frame. That is something that really makes you fall in love with the art and the craft."

According to the producer, the movie mixes two very different types of animation. "In the beginning, we have this very clean, straight, digital animation, with 3D characters and backgrounds

rendered with a 2D look," he explains. "Then, in the second part of the movie, we are transported to a stop-motion universe where everything is very organic and looks like it was made of clay."

The filmmakers are hoping to have the film ready by May of this year. "We are finalizing the stop-motion animation in Portugal, and Spain is handling the post-production for the movie," says Carvalho. "The hope is to work on the post-production in the next few months and wrap the film up by the end of spring."

The producer hopes audiences will feel an immediate connection with the film's main character Rose and her story. "I hope they'll find many things in common with them," he adds. "We also hope they will also enjoy the elements of Portuguese culture that we have included in the movie, including all the backgrounds and the demon characters." ♦

You can visit sardinhaemlata.com for more info about the studio and its upcoming slate.



*The world is full of magical things,
patiently waiting for our hearts to find them*

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QUIETLY EXTRAORDINARY.”**

THE NEW YORK TIMES

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“DOS ORUGUITAS”



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9 ANNIE AWARD
—NOMINATIONS INCL.—
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE
BEST MUSIC • BEST DIRECTION

2 CRITICS CHOICE
—AWARD NOMINATIONS—
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE
BEST SONG “DOS ORUGUITAS”

SCL AWARD
—NOMINATION—
BEST SCORE
GERMAINE FRANCO

6 VES AWARD
—NOMINATIONS INCL.—
BEST VFX IN ANIM. FEATURE
BEST ANIMATED CHARACTER

3 HOLLYWOOD CRITICS
ASSOCIATION FILM AWARD
—NOMINATIONS INCL.—
BEST ANIMATED FEATURE

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Your Cartoon Movie Sampler

There are so many amazing features being unveiled at this year's Cartoon Movie (March 8-10, cartoon-media.eu/movie), and we wish we had the space to spotlight all of them. Here is a brief overview of some of the projects that grabbed our attention. Visit AnimationMagazine.net daily during the event for more in-depth coverage:



Fleur

We know we can expect great things when acclaimed French director Rémi Chayé's name is attached to a movie. The helmer behind such instant classics as *Long Way North* and *Calamity* is back with *Fleur*, another intriguing movie with a fascinating female central character. The script, which is penned by Chayé, Sandra Tosello and Fabrice de Costil, follows the life and times of a young woman who rebels against the awful conditions of working class life in a soap factory and gets a taste of the artistic life in Paris during the early days of the 20th century. The project is produced by Henri Magalon (Maybe Movies). We only have three words after seeing the early images from this movie: Sign us up!



Tony, Shelly and the Spirit

Directed by Czech graphic novelist Flip Pošivač, the stop-motion feature *Tony, Shelly and the Spirit* centers on two oddball characters (one glows, and the other has an odd way of expressing herself) and their encounter with a strange spirit that enjoys destroying the light bulbs in their house. As producer Jakub Vikortin (Nutprodukce) tells us, "I really like the topic of our characters' unique otherness and how to cope with it and work with tolerance. We are trying to reach an audience that is nine-year-old plus, so it's especially challenging to share this topic with this age group and try to entertain and inspire them." He adds, "Our main characters are children with vivid imaginations and whimsical inner lives. We hope our audience will be entertained by the story of glowing Tony and the visual world created by our director and his team."



Just Super

A young girl has to replace her father as the town superhero in *Just Super*, a new Norwegian animated feature directed by Rasmus A. Sivertsen (*Captain Sabertooth*) and produced by Åshild Ramborg (Qvisten Animation). "This is one of those rare projects that you seldom come across – a gripping story that is truly entertaining and thought-provoking for the entire family," says Ramborg. "I believe our core message, which is, 'You don't need to be a superhero to be super!' cannot be repeated enough in our competitive and performance-driven society."

The charming movie is based on an original idea by veteran director Sivertsen. "This added a layer of authenticity to this unconventional take on the superhero genre," says Ramborg. "The irresistible characters are designed by the extraordinary Carter Goodrich (*Ratatouille*, *Coco*, *Despicable Me*). The overall design has a tactility to it that is inspired by Aardman's stop-motion films as well as stylized CGI films like *Trolls* and *The Willoughbys*." The film is slated to open in Norway in September, and an English-language version will be available in the fourth quarter through TrustNordisk.

Unicorn Wars

Fans of highly original, quality animated shorts and movies have been looking forward to the release of Spanish auteur Alberto Vázquez's *Unicorn Wars* for some time now. The imaginative film from the man behind *Birdboy* (*Psiconautas*) and award-winning shorts such as *Decorado* and *Homeless Home* will be spotlighted at Cartoon Movie and released globally later this year.

As Autour de Minuit producer Nicolas Schmerkin tells us, "We've producing Alberto's successful shorts (*Decorado*, *Homeless Home*) and have been associate producers on his first feature film *Birdboy*, so I was excited to continue supporting such a great talent, especially on a crazy film like this one — a daring adult animation project mixing war film, mythological fable and playing with illustration and animation icons like unicorns and teddy bears!"



Schmerkin says he loves how Vázquez tells this ancestral war story with epic battles, interlaced with a more intimate story between two antagonist twin brothers linked by a family secret. "I love his unique way of using cute characters and perverting them to show the dark side of human society," he notes. "The level of animation and backgrounds is very ambitious, especially for a low budget feature. The film is also quite innovative in terms of mixing 2D and 3D techniques for the first time in that way in Blender software. The animation was done in Spain (A Coruña and Bilbao) and in France (in our studios in Paris and Angoulême)."

Niko: Beyond the Northern Lights

Niko, the charming reindeer star of two successful European movies (*Niko and the Way to the Stars* and *Niko 2: Little Brother, Big Trouble*) is getting a third magical outing. The new feature, titled *Niko: Beyond the Northern Lights*, finds our flying reindeer competing with a female reindeer to join Santa's special forces! Directed by Kari Juusonen and Jørgen Lerdam, the film is produced by Finland's Animaker and is being prepared for a Cannes 2024 premiere.

Producer Hannu Tuomainen (Animaker) tells us that, after the first two movies shattered expectations in terms of audience response, he and his team began to play with the idea of a third outing for the beloved character. "We began to develop a story which fits the trilogy idea, but it's also a stand-alone adventure, involving some familiar characters and some new ones," he says. "It is a joy to work again with the same creative team as the first two movies, nationally in Finland with superb animation studio Anima Vitae and with co-producers Ulysses Films from Germany, A.Film Production from Denmark and Moetion Films from Ireland. We have been developing and creating the Niko-universe together over 15 years, which has been a wonderful creative and business pleasure."

Tuomainen is especially proud of the movie's Finnish environment and the local flora and fauna used in Niko's world. "We all know that Santa *really* lives up here, not in the North Pole as some people mistakenly believe. We hope we can offer families an exciting adventure set in a fresh new world — and most importantly, we hope they enjoy tagging along with Niko and have a rollercoaster emotional experience, and leave the theater with a happy feeling."



SHORTS

Little Allan: The Human Antenna

The new Danish movie *Little Allan The Human Antenna* follows the adventures of a young boy named Allan who is talked into acting as a human antenna for his UFO-obsessed neighbor. Things get complicated when a friendly alien girl named Britney saves his life. Directed by Amalie Naesby Fick and produced by Trine Heidegaard and Thomas Heinesen, the Nordisk Film/Pop Up Production project is slated for a 2022 release.

"Amalie Naesby Fick had a passion and clear and strong vision for the adaptation of the children's book our film is based on," says Heinesen. "I like Amalie's intention to pair the strong Scandinavian social-realistic children's film tradition with the high joke-count in both dialogue and animation of the American animated comedies, into a mixture of a quirky, sensitive and fun film for the whole family. Although the film's story contains some serious topics, I think we succeed in creating a heartwarming adventure film that uses humor and absurdity to touch the lives of both children and adults — and the animation itself is really good and quite cartoony, despite a low budget."



Mars Express

Alina Ruby, the heroine of the new French sci-fi noir *Mars Express*, is the kind of cool private detective we love to see on the big screen. She and her digital partner Carlos Rivera are trying to protect a cybernetics students from nefarious assassins on their way to the Red Planet. The movie is directed by Jérémie Périn and produced by Didier Creste (Everybody

On Deck) and co-produced by Je Suis Bien Content, EVL Prod, Plume Finance, France 3 Cinéma and Gébeka Films.

"We wanted to bring this dystopic vision of the world to animated life," says Creste (*Lastman, In a Rush*). "Making a film on Mars could only be possible through animation. You can describe our movie as a cross between *Chinatown* and *Blade Runner*, since it focuses on an investigation conducted by two detectives: a woman and an android. I would say Philip K. Dick, Raymond Chandler and great filmmakers like Brian De Palma, David Cronenberg and John Car-

penter are sources of inspiration. Our big challenge is fine-tuning our 2D/3D pipeline between five different studios — and to produce the film for about 7 million euros during COVID! We're still hoping to deliver the film by the end of 2022, if all goes well!"

We'll keep our fingers crossed, Didier. ♦



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MILESTONES

The Tiger Who Came To Tea



Kensuke's Kingdom



Howling with Greatness

London-based Lupus Films celebrates two decades of producing timeless animated content for global audiences.

It's hard to believe that it's been 20 years since **Camilla Deakin** and **Ruth Fielding** started their acclaimed and influential animation studio **Lupus Films** in London. Throughout the years, the company has delivered a wide selection of top-quality, award-winning shorts, specials, series and features including *The Snowman & The Snowdog*, *Ethel & Ernest*, *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* and *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*. We recently caught up with Camilla and Ruth to mark this special benchmark in their careers:

Can you tell us a little bit about the beginnings of Lupus and how the company came to be?

Camilla: Ruth and I first worked together at Channel 4 in the arts & animation department. We always got on so well and had similar tastes, so it made sense to set up a company together. When we first started working together we realized we went to the same school (Pimlico School on *Lupus Street* in London) so we had a lot in common. Our first production was called *Little Wolf's Book of Badness* and the word for 'wolf' in Latin is 'lupus' – so Lupus Films felt like a great name!

What would you say is your specialty? What makes a Lupus Films animated feature/short/series different from others?

We specialize in well-told stories and beautifully crafted animation. We always want to make films that will last, that people want to watch over and over again and that don't date.

How many people work at your company currently?

We have six full-time staff as well as a few

regular part-time staff, plus me and Ruth. When we are in production we also engage freelancers which increases the numbers considerably. I think we are currently employing around 60 people across two productions.

Did the pandemic affect the way you produce animation or were you already working remotely anyway?

We were not working remotely before the pandemic, but we very quickly adapted and got our regular crew set up to work from home. We had been back in the office a bit recently, before the new advice to work from home again. We find most of our crew like working from home some of the time but not necessarily all the time as they miss the social aspects of work, as do we!

So, what do you love about working in animation?

We love the people who work in animation and the amazing creativity that we witness every day. When you are working on a big animation project, you really feel like you are part of a big family – especially as there are lots of people we like to work with regularly who have been part of the extended Lupus Films family for many years. Despite all the responsibilities of running a studio and the stresses of production, we can honestly say that we have never regretted setting up our own company for a single moment. Plus, we still enjoy each other's company and, most importantly, we always remember to have fun!

Which animated feature/show changed your life? When did you know you wanted to work



Camilla Deakin and Ruth Fielding

in animation?

Camilla: I loved *Fantasia* when I first saw it as a child. "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" sequence really stuck with me and I also loved the way it was all set to music. It showed me how animation could really transport you to another world.

Ruth: I loved *Ivor the Engine* and *Bagpuss*, I wanted to live in Ivor's world and I wanted to be Emily from *Bagpuss*. I also liked jumping around the living room pretending to be Hong Kong Phooey, a number one super guy, even though I was a girl!

Can you tell us a bit about your current slate?

Currently we are in production with a feature film adaptation of Michael Morpurgo's novel *Kensuke's Kingdom*. We are about halfway through production and it is looking fabulous so far. But you will have to wait until 2023 to see it! We are also in production with a new animated preschool series for a major streamer (still top secret). In addition to this, we have a number of feature films and TV specials and series in development with various partners, including an animated feature film about Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, *Las Dos Fridas*, directed by Paloma Baeza; an adaptation of the best-selling *Molesworth* books written by Geoffrey Willans and illustrated by Ronald Searle,



Ethel & Ernest



We're Going on a Bear Hunt



The Snowman & The Snowdog



Molesworth

directed by Uli Meyer; and another about the life of Parisian icon and Man Ray's muse, *Kiki*, directed by Peter Dodd. We are also working on a new Halloween special with co-producers Dream Logic, called *The Ghastly Ghoul*, which is directed by Kealan O'Rourke. We are not ready to announce any of the other projects quite yet, but suffice to say it's been a busy time!

You recently branched out into doing live action as well. Does this mean you will do less animation?

We will never stop doing animation as it is our first love, and we are busier than ever developing new animated projects. The live-action Christmas movie came about because we were working with producer Robert Chandler on some development projects and he happened to show us an idea he'd come up with and we loved it, so we offered to option it and develop the script together. It's not so surprising, given that we love Christmas movies at Lupus Films, and it was a really heart-warming story in the best tradition of British rom-coms. Ultimately, we are in the business of telling stories and entertaining people, so it's not so different developing a live-action film to an animated one. The main difference is the schedule – apart from the scripting, the whole production of our live-action movie took place from start to finish within six months, which

was a very strange feeling!

What are some of your big challenges in 2022?

I think the biggest challenge we are facing at the moment is that the boom in production has led to a lack of good available crew. There is a lot of competition for good animators at the top of their game. In addition, the double whammy of Brexit and the pandemic led to a lot of animators leaving the U.K., which means we can't use them if we are relying on the U.K. tax credit as part of our financing. But we are investing time and money into new training initiatives to make sure there is plenty of new talent coming into the industry who have the skills to work in a professional environment on long-form productions.

When you look back at your two decades of producing top-notch animation, what are some of the best memories that you will always cherish?

Camilla: Making TV special *The Snowman and The Snowdog* and feature film *Ethel & Ernest* with author Raymond Briggs was an amazing experience. He is so incredibly talented and such a wonderful person to collaborate with. Visits down to his crowded studio in Sussex are always a treat. I will always cherish meeting Sir Paul McCartney and finding out that he was going to write an original

song for our film *Ethel & Ernest*. He was extremely generous with his time and even phoned me a few times for a chat!

Ruth: Well, talking of pop stars, working with Robbie Williams, Don Black and David Arnold on the song for *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* was a massive treat for me, and I think winning an International Emmy for the same film must be my all-time career high. However, when I look back over the last 20 years, I think Camilla and I have had most fun at some of the European pitching forums like Cartoon Forum with all our friends and work-family in the industry, doing what we do best: pitching and putting together finance for great shows and having a lot of fun whilst doing that.

What kind of advice do you offer newbies who want to make it in animation?

I would advise newbies to make sure they have a really slick showreel and a well-designed website, so that when they are applying for work they really stand out. I would also advise them to look at which studios' output they admire and try to get experience in the types of animation and the software packages that those studios use. That way, they will be off to a flying start when they apply for positions at those studios.

For more info, visit lupusfilms.com.

EVENT SPOTLIGHT



It's Time for Our Favorite Awards Show!

ASIFA-Hollywood is planning another memorable Annie Awards ceremony – come rain or shine, or lockdown!

For almost half a century, the annual Annie Awards ceremony has given the animation community a great opportunity to come together and celebrate excellence in our beloved artform and industry every year. As we went to press with this issue, the event organizers confirmed that the 49th edition will be held virtually, just as it was in 2021, as a cautionary measure due to the pandemic. The livestreamed ceremony will now be held Saturday, March 12. (Make sure you visit our website or get our daily e-newsletter to find out the latest news about the ceremony!)

As ASIFA-Hollywood president Sue Shakespeare tells us, the planning committee has been quite aware of this be-ready-for-anything state of things. “What is exciting is that our plans are still being finalized,” she notes “We’ve had to adapt and adjust, and stay in touch with all of the ‘late-breaking’ news. This means we are being dynamically creative ... developing new ideas as they are needed.”

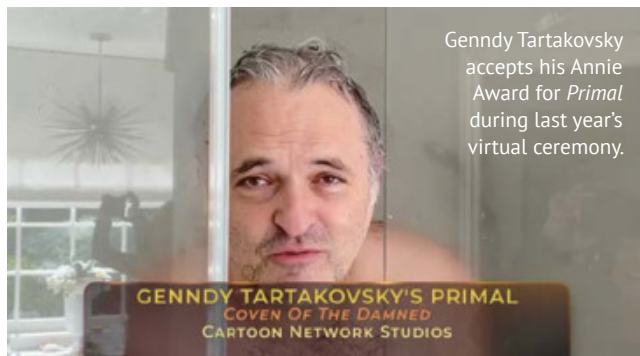
The org’s exec director Frank Gladstone adds, “What I can tell you is that the Annies are generating more interest each year, pandemic or not. There has been for the last several years more submissions with each cycle and this year is no exception with more than 2,500 submissions, up again about 10 percent from the previous year. There is also a continuing desire for more opportunities for recognition, more specialized categories, more ... well ... more! This is, I think, indicative of a very healthy and active industry.”

Toon Industry Pride

ASIFA vice president, author and animation historian Jerry Beck says he continues to be astounded by the quality of the submitted entries for the Annies. “Every year, the quality of work gets better and better, and each year the amount of entries for Annie nomination grows

and grows,” he points out. “Streaming services have exploded the last two years with the pandemic lockdowns. The animation industry has been thriving like never before. Many of the films this year were created and produced during the COVID emergency and demonstrate how the artform is quite immune to disease – no boosters required. And the quality of the work is at an all-time high. There are many high points in the history of animation – but how our artform performed and progressed during the pandemic will be studied (and celebrated) for years to come. So proud to be part of it all.”

Of course, ASIFA’s work goes way beyond



Genndy Tartakovsky accepts his Annie Award for *Primal* during last year’s virtual ceremony.

the annual awards ceremony. Shakespeare points out that the org launched a very successful diversity initiative last year. “We’re working with a wonderful consultant to help us identify ways that ASIFA-Hollywood can help make a difference,” she says. “We also have some exciting new animation preservation initiatives headed up by Jerry Beck, which we can talk about soon. We also have several new scholarship programs being launched and we will be expanding the work and support we do in the animation education field.”

Gladstone says he is also thrilled with how well the animation community has coped and thrived during two very difficult years. “We were already prepared to work from home so the transition, while not without some bumps, was fast



From left: ASIFA Hollywood’s Jerry Beck, Sue Shakespeare and Frank Gladstone are planning another fantastic edition of the Annie Awards.

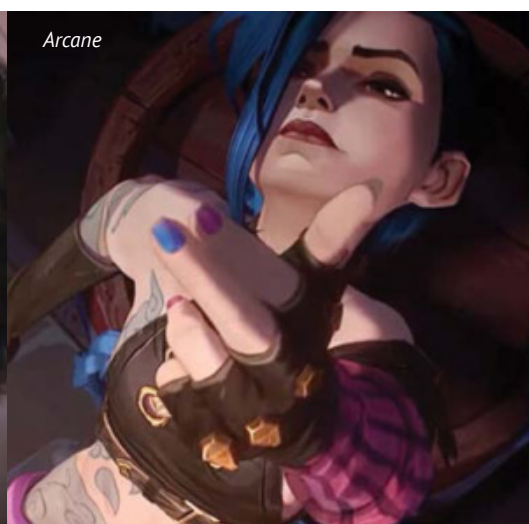
and easy compared to what was happening in the rest of the entertainment industry,” he points out. “Though it seems counterintuitive, in a way COVID boosted (pun intended) our industry, with more delivery platforms seeking more content and pretty quickly realizing that animation could fill in some of the gaps. Further, with the advent of more programming needs, risks became more acceptable and an influx of new and more diverse talent, new production companies, new sorts of stories, new techniques, new artistic approaches have been able to gain a foothold and prosper.”

He concludes, “I suspect that, when things settle down and we get back to normal, whatever that may be, things will even out for our industry – but I don’t think we will return to where we were. Once more in its history, animation has been reinvigorated. Oddly, at least in part by the vicissitudes of a pandemic, we have been reminded again that people love animation, a love that doesn’t fade with age and can, in the *Sturm und Drang* of life, provide a happy and welcome respite!” ♦

The Annie Awards will be livestreamed Saturday, March 12 at 7 p.m., free for anyone to watch. A complete recording will be available the next day at annieawards.org.



Encanto



Arcane



Belle

The Annies: Major Categories at a Glance

Best Feature

Encanto
Luca
Raya and the Last Dragon
Sing 2
The Mitchells vs. the Machines

Best Indie Feature

Belle
Flee
Fortune Favors Lady Nikuko
Pompo the Cinephile
The Summit of the Gods

Best Special Production

For Auld Lang Syne
La Vie de Château
Mum Is Pouring Rain
Namoo
The Witcher: Nightmare of the Wolf

Best Short Subject

Bestia
Easter Eggs
Maalbeek
Night Bus
Steakhouse

Best TV/Media – Preschool

Ada Twist, Scientist
Odo
Muppet Babies
Stillwater
Xavier Riddle and the Secret Museum

Best TV/Media – Children

Amphibia
Carmen Sandiego
Dug Days
Maya and the Three
We the People

Best TV/Media – General Audience

Arcane
Bob's Burgers
Love, Death + Robots
Star Wars: Visions
Tuca & Bertie

Best Student Film

A Film about a Pudding
Hope
I Am a Pebble
Night of the Living Dread
Slouch

Best Direction – Feature

Mamoru Hosoda (*Belle*)
Jared Bush, Byron Howard, Charise Castro Smith (*Encanto*)
Jonas Poher Rasmussen, Kenneth Ladekjær (*Flee*)
Enrico Casarosa (*Luca*)
Mike Rianda, Jeff Rowe (*The Mitchells vs. the Machines*)

Juried Awards

Winsor McCay Award

Ruben Aquino, Lillian Schwartz, Toshio Suzuki

June Foray Award

Renzo Kinoshita (posthumous), Sayoko Kinoshita

Ub Iwerks Award

Python Foundation

Special Achievement Award

Glen Vilppu

Certificate of Merit

Evan Vernon



Annie vs. Oscar Winners of the Last 10 Years

Year	Annie Award Winners	Oscar Winners
2010	How to Train Your Dragon	Toy Story 3
2011	Rango	Rango
2012	Wreck-It Ralph	Brave
2013	Frozen	Frozen
2014	How to Train Your Dragon 2	Big Hero 6
2015	Inside Out	Inside Out
2016	Zootopia	Zootopia
2017	Coco	Coco
2018	Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse	Spider-Verse
2019	Klaus	Toy Story 4
2020	Soul	Soul

SHORTS

The Shaman's Apprentice spotlights the importance of spirituality in Inuit cultures.



Ways of the Ancestors

Director Zacharias Kunuk spotlights Inuit spirituality in his Oscar shortlisted *The Shaman's Apprentice*.

It has been over 20 years since Nunavut director Zacharias Kunuk received numerous awards and glowing reviews for his live-action feature *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*. Now the 63-year-old filmmaker is back in the limelight with a beautiful animated short titled *Angakusajaujuq: The Shaman's Apprentice*, which received the FIPRESCI Award at Annecy and the Best Canadian Short prize at the Ottawa International Animation Festival last fall. The meticulously crafted stop-motion project follows a female shaman in training who visits the underworld to find out why one community member has fallen sick.

"Ever since Christianity came from the other side of the world, shamanism has been the opposite of European belief," Kunuk tells us in an email interview. "So when I was growing up as a child I never heard people talk about shamanism; my parents were on the Anglican side and it was forbidden. I felt we needed to record and hear more of these stories, so our future generations can learn about our traditional beliefs that existed long before Christianity."

Kunuk points out that he is always trying different ways to tell his traditional Inuit stories. "I believe the stop-motion medium fit the story," he explains. "It gave us the freedom to show things on screen that we could never do with live action. It's really liberating as a storyteller to have these tools. We can imagine and properly show the stories, spirits and world of Shamanism as it has been told and



'Animation gave us the freedom to show things on screen that we could never do with live action: It's really liberating as a storyteller to have these tools.'

— Director Zacharias Kunuk

described to us. We showed it at the schools in Igloolik, and the kids loved seeing animation."

Magic of Dragonframe

According to the director, *The Shaman's Apprentice* took about three years to make and about 50 people worked on Kunuk's short altogether. "I had a great team of animators to work with and I was amazed at what they could do," he says. "They used Dragonframe software for the stop-motion capture and a camera made by Ximea that was very small (1" cube), and a set of old C-mount cine lenses. The motion control was done using Cognisys, ARC and Berkey motion-control gear, along with some other custom built pieces. Our lights were fully LED, made by Fiilex, and also a custom-built programmable LED light to make the qulliq lighting."

The puppets used in the short were about 10 inches tall and the largest set – the Husky cave – was about six feet tall. The ice tunnel depicted in the project was around 10 feet long and the main outdoor set was a big foam-snow table that was eight feet by eight feet.

"Our main challenge was to get the details

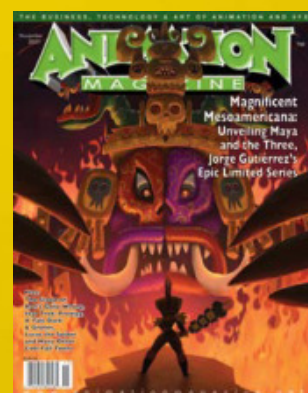
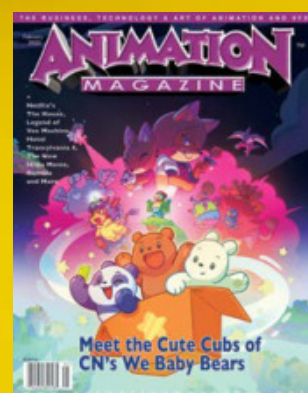
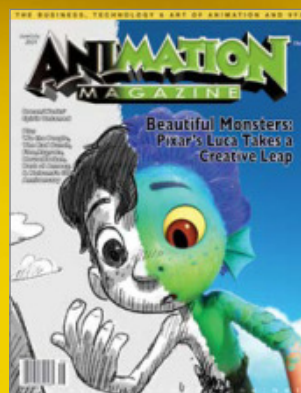
right," says the director. "The set, puppets, clothes had to be in our Ammituq style. I get obsessed by the details and want everything to be right, but with animation you can't change things so easily during production. Everything has to be planned and ready to go, and there are no last-minute tweaks."

There were also visual details that needed to be adjusted as Kunuk learned more about the culture. For example, the director had planned to use a ladder for the scene where the characters visit the underworld. "But in that time, they had no idea what a ladder looked like, so I had to find that detail from my Elders."

The director says he is quite pleased with the results of his efforts. "This is the second time I have tried animation, and I'm really happy with our co-producing team. They did a great job! I hope our short opens eyes to what has been closed by European religion. After all, here in Igloolik, it has been inhabited for over 4,000 years and European religion only arrived here 200 years ago!" ♦

For more info, visit shamansapprentice.com or isuma.tv/movies/angakusajaujuq.

Missing Your Connection to the Global Animation Community?



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Simulating an Imperfect Reality

VFX supervisor Dan Glass details a few of the behind-the-scenes secrets of *The Matrix Resurrections*.

By Trevor Hogg

With the current advances in virtual reality, real-time rendering and AI, the futuristic world envisioned by the Wachowski siblings is becoming more science than fiction. When it was first released in 1991, *The Matrix* became a huge box office sensation and the messianic figure of Neo became a signature role for Keanu Reeves. In the recent reboot *The Matrix Resurrections*, director Lana Wachowski expanded upon the original trilogy which sees protagonist Thomas Anderson/Neo drawn once again into the conflict between oppressive machines and human resistance fighters. Frequent Wachowski collaborator Dan Glass (*Cloud Atlas*) oversaw the creation of 2,300 visual effects by primary vendor DNEG, Framestore and One of Us.

Describing how *The Matrix Resurrections* fits within the franchise, Glass remarks, "It sets out to be more real and a different flavor, but a continuation of the story." Principal photography took place in San Francisco for the simulated environment constructed by the machines to deceive human beings. "The first three movies were almost entirely shot stage-based but it goes beyond that," he notes. "The camerawork and composition tried to be like a graphic novel; that was part of the look of the Matrix, because it was a computer's idea of what people would think was perfection. This Matrix is an upgrade of what we have seen before. The computers are trying to create something that is even more real by putting in imperfections. The previous Matrix took place in a megacity while this one covers the world, which is because un-

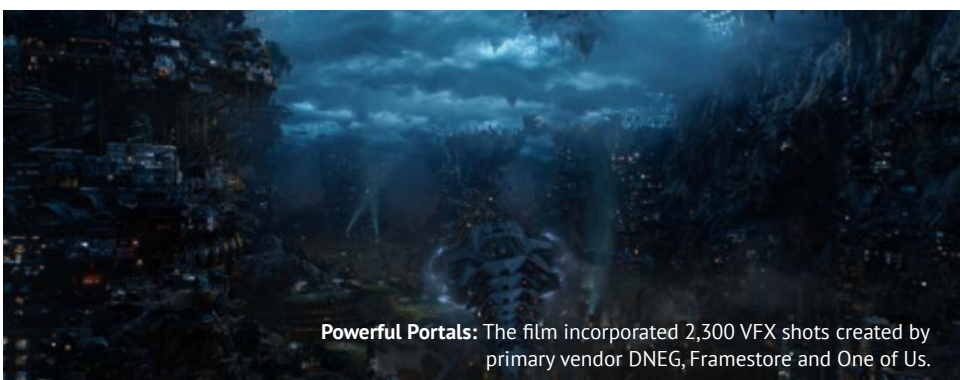
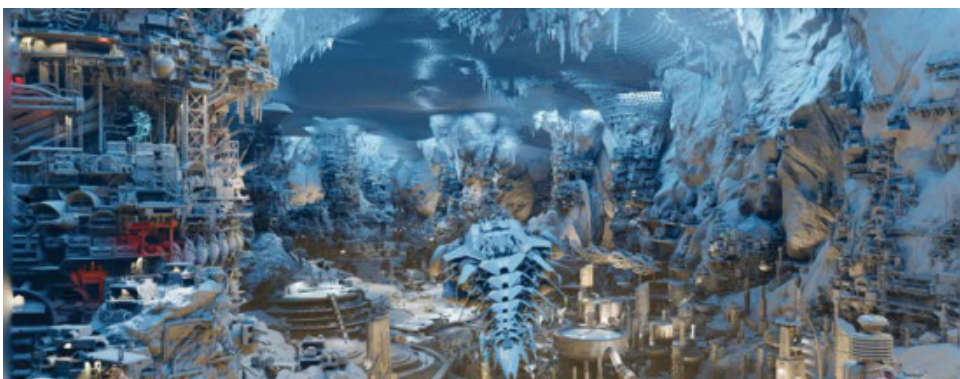
derpinning it is now a much larger operation, a vast number of pod towers."

Reality Bytes

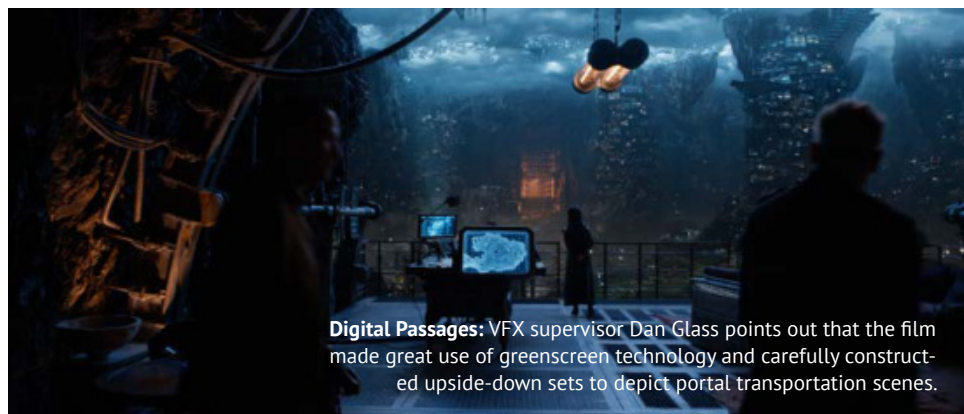
Having to work with practical elements did not make the digital augmentation easier. "Arguably it makes things a lot harder," notes Glass. "The integration work becomes complex and we were shooting with zoom lenses on Steadicams with few opportunities to get data at the speed at which everything was being

shot. But you know what the image needs to look like, which is critical. It also creates a more relatable aesthetic to the Matrix itself. But what we call the 'real,' which are the tunnels and sewers, the ugly underpinnings, had to be digitally fabricated because those environments don't exist. That being said, we had to make them feel as real as possible because they were up against awesomely rich recognizably real footage that the rest of the movie was shot in."

Two major set pieces requiring a close col-



Powerful Portals: The film incorporated 2,300 VFX shots created by primary vendor DNEG, Framestore and One of Us.



Digital Passages: VFX supervisor Dan Glass points out that the film made great use of greenscreen technology and carefully constructed upside-down sets to depict portal transportation scenes.



'This Matrix is an upgrade of what we have seen before. The computers are trying to create something that is even more real by putting in imperfections.'

— VFX supervisor Dan Glass

laboration between special effects, stunts, camera department and visual effects were the high-rise rooftop jump and the motorcycle chase through the streets of San Francisco. "The chase with the motorcycle had a huge number of practical plates with the real actors on the rigged motorcycle pulled through the streets, as well as stunt doubles," notes Glass. "They erected a Steadicam on a flatbed built around the bike so that they could film in a manner wanted for the sequence. Visual effects was there to paint out rigs and added additional people who could get closer and added more of them in the background. The big car flips on the street were rigged by J.D. Schwalm and there were real helicopters in the majority of the shots."

"The thing that will surprise people about the rooftop jump is most of that is real footage," says Glass. He subsequently laughs when asked about how Keanu Reeves and Carrie-Anne Moss were convinced to jump off of a 44 story building. "That's the magic of Lana Wachowski! Keanu and Carrie-Anne did that jump 15 times," he responds. "We cleaned out all of the rigs and a normal amount of crew on

the rooftop. Some shots are an actual CG rooftop. There were moments where we adjusted an arm position or pose and took them off of the background only to take out the more obvious pendulum swings. But we wanted to be faithful to the beautiful source photography which was captured during a real sunrise."

Transportation between the real world and the Matrix is no longer confined to phone booths and mirrors. "We have portals where they can go from one environment to another," remarks Glass. "They're akin to how the mirrors were used in the earlier movies to get back to their real-world ship. Those used a variety of techniques. Sometimes they're just greenscreens and then carefully matched up backgrounds from one place to another. Other times we built set pieces. There is a section in an early part of the movie where there is a lot of weirdness in terms of gravity. Some of those sets were built upside down or placed 90 degrees next to each other and we did some wire gags between them."

Another new addition are the concussive blasts that Neo is able to generate. "It is loosely based on how Neo used to fly and he could

impact the ground, send off ripples and take off," observes Glass. "In this movie, the effect is more like a force shield or punch that Neo can use. We wanted to keep it in this world of reality. It is also related to the way he can stop bullets which we have previously seen. We have this moment when Neo puts his shield up, and he and Trinity drive through the fireball with the smoke and flames wrapping around them. There is another scene when Smith picks up a bathroom sink and brings it crashing down on Neo and he uses it there. The sink breaks, fragments and flies off."

There were also some subtle upgrades such as the signature streaming green code of the Matrix. "Lana wanted the code to have a gold ornament motif so it has a highlight kick," explains Glass. "The font set was done by my father, who is a language specialist. The code is dressed into a lot of subtle areas that might require a second viewing for it to be noticed."

The mirror effect also made use of some practical trickery. "We cut a hole in a real mirror so that Keanu could put his arm through it," says Glass. "The mirror was also removed so that the camera is looking back and we put the reflections in after the fact."

The films' signature Bullet Time visuals also make an appearance, but in a different form. "Neo is frozen and the character called the Analyst can maneuver and walk around in real time," explains Glass. "Things are moving at different frame rates and the sun travels across the room creating a slow tension build across the scene. That was shot the most we could in real locations using a stereo rig with cameras at different frame rates."

Glass admits that being able to pull off visuals that defy expectations was the biggest challenge for him and his team. "We did use and explore techniques like volumetric capture; it is used to merge characters who fuse together at one point for a bypass operation in the Matrix," he notes. "To get their performance to line up, we shot a volumetric capture array that was used within the set with the actors and dressed background, and then applied machine learning and AI to map one to the other."

He says the overall goal was to create a new installment that audiences — especially the fans of the original trilogy — would enjoy. He adds, "The San Francisco chase was exciting for me to see come together, and is a great example of how we tried to push reality." ♦

Warner Bros.' *The Matrix Resurrections* is currently playing in theaters and streaming on HBO Max.



Tech Reviews

Wacom Cintiq Pro 16

Wacom's latest entry into the Cintiq family is a good one. The new Cintiq Pro 16 is thin and more mobile than previous editions – especially at this screen size (16.6 x 11.2 x 1.0 inches). I'm frequently running back and forth between office and home and set, and having a Cintiq in a carrying case next to my laptop is great when you have to draw something up quick for a client – or when inspiration strikes and you want to quickly sketch something out.

Of course, you might say, "My iPad is great for that kind of thing." And you would be correct, but only to an extent. Like, what if you are a sculptor and want to flesh out ideas in ZBrush? Or a digital matte painter or portrait artist, and need a pen with the sensitivity and comfort that the Wacom Pro Pen 2 provides. The pen with this Cintiq is more sensitive and accurate than the previous version, and along with the anti-glare glass cover, you get that subtle, tactile feel of drawing on a responsive surface. Quite honestly, you can feel the differ-



ence that 4x the sensitivity gives you. Wacom has also been attentive to keeping any kind of lag to a minimum, and the bonding between the screen and the glass keeps getting thinner to prevent unwanted parallax between the nib of the pen and the artwork.

The workflow is dual, meaning that you can be drawing with one hand and the other can be controlling zooming, rotating and repositioning with programmable touch gestures. Or, if touch is not your thing, there is a handy button tucked in the top of the tablet to quickly switch off the touch capability. Further, the Express Keys are found on either side edge of the tablet – four to a side – so your Ctrl, Shift and Alt are conveniently accessible. If you are an Express Key remote person, that accessory is still supported. So, you can hold the remote

in one hand while sketching with the other.

The Cintiq Pro 16 is a 4K monitor with the display pushed through either an HDMI or USB-C cable. The specs for the color are 98 percent Adobe RGB and calibratable with Wacom's color calibrator and profiler. It's not HDR, but it will be pretty accurate for most things outside of color grading – and if you are color grading on your Wacom, you are probably in the wrong business.

It's not a trivial spend at \$1,500, but this isn't an entry level tablet. This is for the professional digital artist who makes their living creating, and the investment into the feel of the tablet and the quality of picture will be worthwhile.

Website: wacom.com

Price: \$1,499.95

HP ZBook Fury 17 G8

I am constantly amazed at how we continue to fit more and more power into smaller and smaller spaces. I'm sitting here, writing this review on the HP ZBook Fury 17 G8 mobile workstation – and really, writing a review in Google Docs on this piece of hardware is much akin to coasting in first gear in a school zone inside of a Lamborghini. But fear not, I've been running it through its paces – at least around the Media & Entertainment spaces. I would honestly need some kind of scientific dataset to run through the NVidia RTX A5000's TensorFlow to really open it up.

I'm going to start with the best: the monitor, a DreamColor 4K display that inherits the technology from the HP line of professional displays found in many a color suite and on most desks of compositors. And it has the blue and white check mark indication that Pantone has given its stamp of approval. The image is crisp and contrasty with a 120Hz refresh and a peak 600 nits. It's absolutely capable of color critical tasks – but, like the Wacom Cintiq Pro mentioned in the companion review, you shouldn't be grading major projects on it. Instead, you grade on the real HP DreamColor display that you can hook into your Fury via one of the USB-C ports.

Speaking of ports, the Fury has many. A couple USB-Cs, HDMI, MiniDisplay, an SD slot, an

Ethernet port, audio jack and a couple of the tried and true USD 3.1 Type-As. Plus, if you want, you can always attach an external Thunderbolt dock.

Under the hood, my review unit sports an Intel Xeon W-11955M vPro CPU running at 2.60Ghz and 64GB of RAM (you can get to



128GB) – which is quite honestly just as powerful as my full Z820 workstation. I have a 1TB SSD, but there are four ports for storage that can each take a 2TB SSD – so ... 8TB? In my laptop? All of the expandable components are readily accessible underneath the unit with toolless panels. So, upgrading is hardly even a thing.

Then, you have the aforementioned NVidia RTX A5000, which makes the world so much more manageable. All of the M&E software I ran worked like a champ: Maya, Max, Houdini, Arnold, V-Ray, anything Adobe, Nuke – whatever. Most performed as if they were on a full workstation. That said, I didn't get around to running extremely heavy fluid simulations, but suspect you would still manage to get some FX work done when in a pinch.

Some additional bonuses (which may sound critical to some) are the laundry list of security features ranging from tamper detection to see if anyone accessed the chassis, to BIOS checks, to software protection, to Tile-driven tracking (even when the laptop is off) and even a little physical shutter that you can slide over the webcam.

The Fury 17 G8 is not a laptop for the faint of heart. The entry level version isn't bad at all, but to get into the realm of true workstation performance, you can plan to spend much more than heading to Best Buy to pick up something to write emails on (or Google Docs). But for those you need that type of power – this machine has got it, and probably more.

Website: hp.com

Price: Begins at \$3,000

by Todd Sheridan Perry



Foundry's Mari 5.0

Late last year, Foundry released a critical upgrade to their 3D painting and look-dev tool, Mari — bringing it up to 5.0. This latest version offers new features to pipeline support, performance, proceduralism and painting (the Four Ps, I suppose you could say).

We have been seeing the USD file format become more and more ubiquitous as facilities are adopting the format for layout and sharing between facilities and DCCs. Mari utilizes this format, incorporating it into its painting and look dev so that exported assets can be viewed in software with Hydra-supported viewports. In this way, the work coming from Mari artists more closely reflects what the lighting artists are going to be working with and rendering. This dramatically tightens a loop between the two departments — getting the assets into scenes faster and more predictably. This would be the “Pipeline” of the Four Ps.

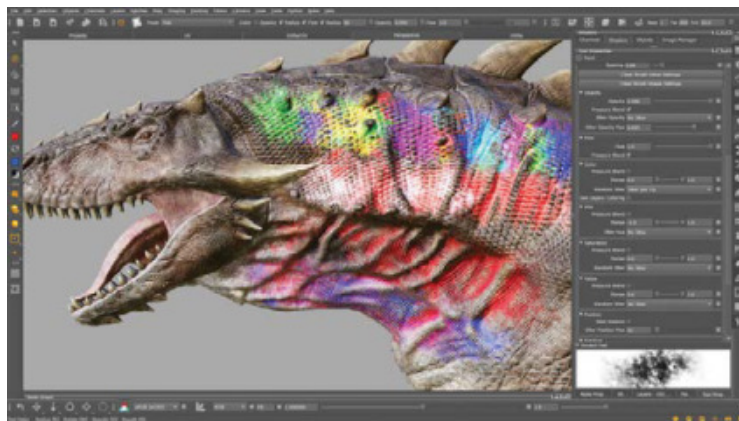
In Painting, Foundry has provided a plethora of paint tools to increase artist control over variation and application. A much-asked-for feature has been added for a more robust control system jittering numerous values such as flow, hue, saturation, value, position, rotation. And these can be set to the brush stroke, or even individual paint hits within the brush. And these variations can be set independently and driven by the pressure of your pen. With individual control over each parameter, you can create a gazillion different patterns, with every stroke

being slightly different.

In conjunction with these brush controls comes an expanded use of images as brush tips. Before, an alpha in an image would be used as the brush tip — the stencil, so to speak. But artists can now use any of the RGBA channels to determine what image the tip will lay down — or even feed all the channels into the tip and jitter them to add some controlled chaos to the patterns.

Under Proceduralism, artists can add filters non-destructively to a bake point — a place in the node flow where you want to flatten the graph so it doesn't continually process everything upstream. Previously, one would have to save everything down to a paint layer and then add filters downstream. This workflow was disruptive and cumbersome. But when you add the filters directly in the bake point, adjustment can be tweaked without much overhead.

Also in Proceduralism, there are five new procedural gradient patterns to make soft masks across broad areas on the model based on projecting from the camera or objects, or setting locators in space around the model. This not only provides a lot of flexibility and control over the masks, but because they are



based on things other than the model, it means that the gradients will not change if the model or UVs are updated.

Finally, in Performance, Foundry in collaboration with Weta (who originally developed Mari), has accelerated the flattening of Bake Points or committing paint to a layer by making a hybrid calculation utilizing the CPU and the GPU. The results have been up to 50 percent faster in some situations.

Website: foundry.com/products/mari
Price: \$2,392 (buy); \$789 (rental price per quarter) ♦

Todd Sheridan Perry is an award-winning VFX supervisor and digital artist whose credits include *Black Panther*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and *The Christmas Chronicles*. You can reach him at todd@teaspoonvfx.com.

In Next Month's Animation Magazine

- ❖ Behind the Scenes of Pixar's *Turning Red*
- ❖ Prime Video's *The Boys Presents: Diabolical*
- ❖ Education & Career Guide
- ❖ The Rising Stars of Animation, Class of '22



They're Complicated!

How the realistic and multi-layered heroines of anime are blazing new trails in the animation world.

By Charles Solomon

In recent years, animators in Japan have created an impressive array of heroines who are layered, unique individuals. Unlike many of their American counterparts, these girls don't have to be spunky: They can be outgoing, shy, athletic, artistic, talkative, quiet, awkward, talented and/or intelligent.

Suzu, the heroine of Mamoru Hosoda's *Belle*, is the latest of his well-realized contemporary young women. Although the film is a retelling of *Beauty and the Beast*, Suzu is no beauty. The lonely inhabitant of a fading town in Shikoku, she's coping with the death of her mother. Suzu has shut herself off from the world, unable to express her impressive musical talent — except as Belle, her alter ego who is the reigning diva of the cyber world of U.

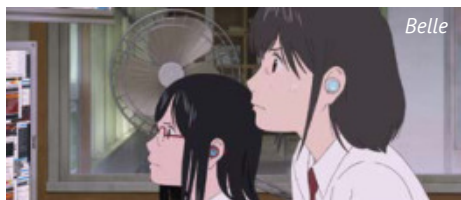
Retellings of *Beauty and the Beast* usually center on the Beast and his need to reveal the gentle heart concealed within his monstrous form. Suzu tries to aid an abused boy who haunts U as the baleful Dragon: She learns that when she sings as herself she reaches both the boy and her own wounded heart. Belle's glamorous trappings are as restrictive as the Beast's grotesque body. Suzu's victories enable her to discover who she truly is.

Standing Tall

Makoto Shinkai broke box office records in Japan in 2016 with *Your Name.*, a complex adventure that begins as a body switching teen romcom but morphs into a meditation on the trauma of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake (which Americans call "Fukushima"). Bored with life in her rural hometown, Mitsuha longs for the excitement of Tokyo; Taki is a Tokyo high school student who wants to be an architect. When they begin waking up in each other's bodies, the experience changes both of them for the better. Taki loses some of his awkwardness around a woman he finds attractive; Mitsuha gains the self-confidence to put down her snide classmates. More importantly, she develops

the courage to stand up to her stuffed-shirt father and save many of the townspeople from a devastating meteor strike.

Keiichi Hara's *Miss Hokusai* (2015) centers on a real person: O-Ei, the daughter of the celebrated artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849). Although only a few works can be attributed to her with certainty, O-Ei was an artist in her own right. Hara based the film on the manga by Hinako Sugiura, that depicts the father/daughter and master/pupil relationship between Hokusai and O-Ei as complex and quarrelsome. She respects his immense talent, but loses patience with his inability to manage his money and despises his failure to care for a fictional, handicapped younger daughter.



If O-Ei behaves awkwardly around a handsome admirer, she confidently refuses a suitor who hopes marriage will bring a position in her father's studio. Unapologetically independent and talented, O-Ei reflects the experiences of women in modern Japan who are gaining increasing freedom from the sexism of its traditional culture — including many of the female artists who worked on the film.

Braving Adversity

In Masaaki Yuasa's *Ride Your Wave* (2019), Hinako is a disorganized klutz on land, but in the water, she's an ace surfer who moves with grace and authority. When she moves to a small beach town, she meets first responder Minato. The two characters fall quickly and believably in love. Minato admires Hinako's superior athletic prowess, and assures her she will learn to manage life on land as capably as she maneu-

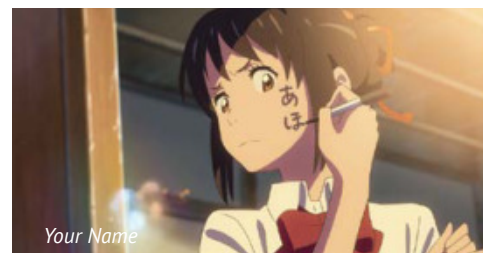
vers her surfboard. She's moved by Minato's selfless commitment to helping others and savors his confidence in her.

When Minato is killed in an accident, Hinako refuses to accept the loss. She believes she can summon him back with their favorite song. A disaster makes her realize she must let go of the past. To honor Minato's dedication to aiding others, Hinako becomes a highly respected lifeguard.

Interesting, complex heroines aren't limited to features by major directors. In *My Hero Academia: Two Heroes*, nerdy, insecure Izuku "Deku" Midoriya visits inventor David Shield on I-Island, a floating city-sized lab for the world's greatest scientists. David's daughter Melissa has no superpowers, but she's a brilliant inventor in her own right. Melissa doesn't quote irrelevant facts or flaunt her intelligence; she doesn't need to. When she sees Deku can't use his strongest punch against the terrorist villains without shattering the bones his forearm, she creates a high-tech wrist support for him.

The list of intriguingly complex female characters in anime is a long one. Hayao Miyazaki said of Lady Eboshi in *Princess Mononoke*, "her mercy and her cruelty know no bounds." In Isao Takahata's *Only Yesterday*, Taeko communes with her fifth grade self to discover what she really wants in life. When Natsuki defeats the terrorist AI program Love Machine at the climax of Hosoda's *Summer Wars*, she's simultaneously frightened by its power, grateful for the help math nerd Kenji and her cousin Kazuma provide, impatient with her boisterous family's kibbitzing, moved by the support she receives from countless viewers and determined to protect people from a deadly threat. Why don't more of her Western counterparts display a comparable complexity? ♦

Charles Solomon's latest book *The Man Who Leapt Through Time: The Films of Mamoru Hosoda* will be published this year by Abrams.



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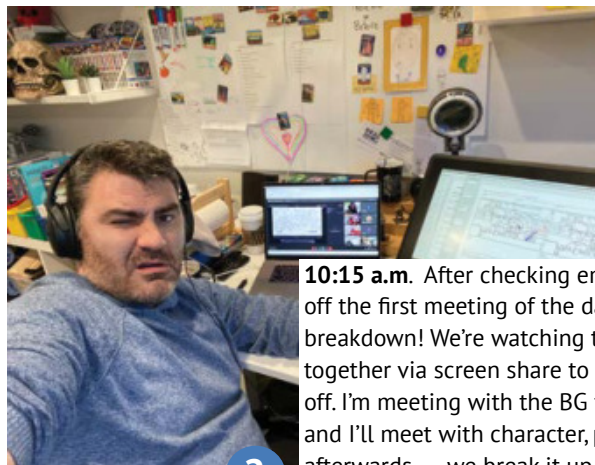
A DAY IN THE LIFE

Matt Burnett, the brilliant co-creator and exec producer of Cartoon Network's hit show *Craig of the Creek*, brightens our cold winter month by kindly sharing his daily life with us.



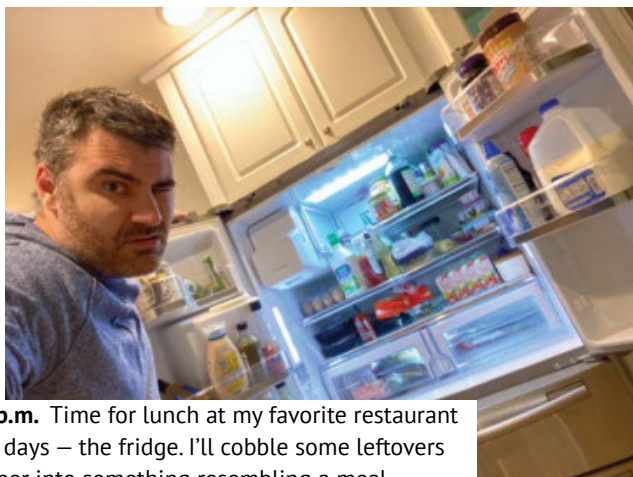
1

9:30 a.m. A perk of working from home on *Craig of the Creek* over the last two years has been having time in the morning to spend with my family rather than on the road commuting. Here I am after dumping the kids at school, enjoying coffee with my wife (who didn't want to be photographed, but I swear is real and does exist.)



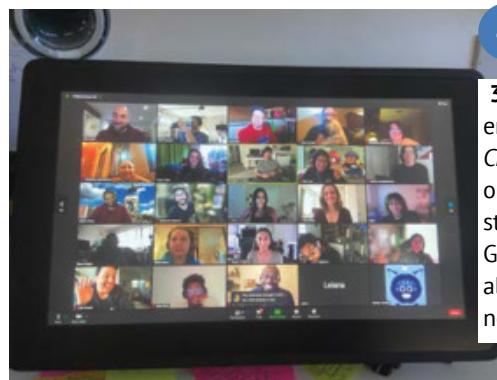
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10:15 a.m. After checking emails, I kick off the first meeting of the day: a design breakdown! We're watching the animatic together via screen share to start things off. I'm meeting with the BG team now, and I'll meet with character, props and FX afterwards — we break it up so no one has to sit on too long of a call.



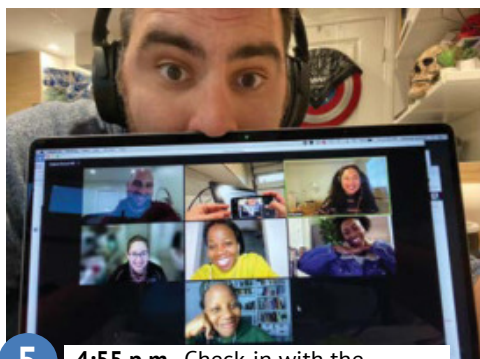
3

1:55 p.m. Time for lunch at my favorite restaurant these days — the fridge. I'll cobble some leftovers together into something resembling a meal.



4

3:09 p.m. The entire *Craig of the Creek* crew gathers on a call for a storyboard pitch! Great way to keep us all connected right now.



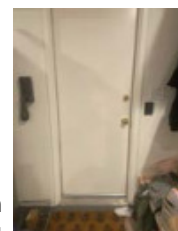
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4:55 p.m. Check-in with the skeleton crew for our *other* show, a preschool spinoff starring Craig's little sister Jessica! (Things are still in the early stages, but a part of every day is spent getting this project closer to production.)



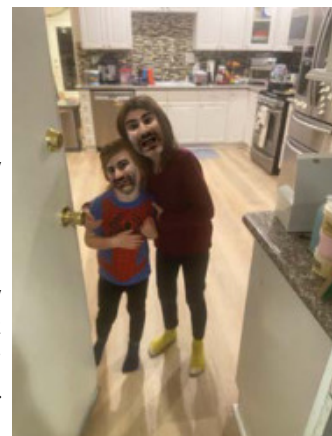
6

5:36 p.m. Getting hands-on with a board to make a fix that needed a quick turnaround. Anything to get things out the door on time.



7

6 p.m. Time to begin my commute home!



8

6:01 p.m. ... And I'm home! My kids are there to welcome me. They look just like their mom.



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